BUDDHADASA AND DOCTRINAL MODERNISATION IN CONTEMPORARY THAI BUDDHISM:

A Social and Philosophical Analysis.

By

Peter Anthony Jackson.

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DECLARATION

Except where otherwise indicated
this thesis is my own work.

P. A. Jackson.

Peter Anthony Jackson.

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ERRATA.

Page & Line.	Error.	Correction.
Page 63, line 27	oposition	opposition
page 79, line 18	negelcted	neglected
page 129, line 20	defintion	definition
page 141, line 2	respecitvely	respectively
page 151, line 16	unwholseome	unwholesome
page 155, line 24	defintion	definition
page 186, line 7	attinment	attainment
page 242, line 5	harmonioulsy	harmoniously
page 263, line 20	acknolwedge	acknowledge

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ABSTRACT.

Phra Buddhadâsa Bhikkhu is without doubt the most controversial and the most innovative interpreter of Buddhist doctrine and teachings in contemporary Thailand. Buddhadâsa has devoted his life to a systematic and thorough re-interpretation of the entire body of Theravâda Buddhist teachings, with the explicit goal of revealing the relevance of the Buddha's message to men and women living in the modern world. However, a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of his total re-interpretative system requires more than simply a philosophical study of Buddhist doctrines and theoretical teachings. Because of the social and political role of institutional Buddhism in Thailand, and because of the importance of his work to educated and progressive Thai laypeople, the sources, motivations and aims of Buddhadâsa's ideas can only be fully detailed when their extra-religious social and political influences are also considered.

That is, Buddhadâsa's systematic re-interpretation of Buddhist teachings should firstly be understood in terms of its relation to the history of doctrinal interpretation and Buddhist studies in Thailand. But this theoretical analysis should at the same time be complemented by an appreciation of the social context of Buddhadâsa's reforms, and the critical as well as supportive responses to his work from the various sections of Thai society. Only when Buddhadâsa's doctrinal reformation of Theravâda Buddhism is appreciated as being both a theoretical and a sociological phenomenon can its significance in contemporary Thailand be fully appreciated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

1 Presentation of Thai and Pali Materials.

A considerable amount of the material studied and detailed in the following chapters has been taken from Thai language sources, and the majority of the terms and concepts relating to Theravāda Buddhism are derived from the Pali language. In addition there are occasional references to the Sanskrit terminology of the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism, and some English language authors quoted have used the Sanskrit forms of Pali terms when discussing Theravāda teachings. The systems used for transliterating Thai, Pali and Sanskrit terms, respectively, into Roman script are given in the following tables. I have followed the usual convention of transliterating Thai terms phonetically with no attempt to mimic the actual Thai script spelling. In contrast each character of Pali and Sanskrit terms, as written in *devanagari* script, is given a Roman script equivalent.

1.1 Systems of Transliteration.

A. Pali.

The Pali Text Society system for rendering Pali terms into Roman script is followed. The following characters are used:

i.Vowels:	*a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, o.*
ii.Gutturals:	*k, kh, g, gh, ṅ.*
iii.Palatals:	*c, ch, j, jh, ñ.*
iv.Cerebrals:	*ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ.*
v.Dentals:	*t, th, d, dh, n.*
vi.Labials:	*p, ph, b, bh, m.*
vii.Semi-vowels:	*y, r, ḷ, l, v.*
viii.Sibilant:	*s.*
ix.Aspirate:	*h.*

x. *Niggahīta* (Nasal): ṁ.

B. **Sanskrit.**

The characters used to transliterate Sanskrit terms are the same as for Pali, with the addition of palatal and cerebral sibilants: *s'*, *ṣ*; the vowels and diphthings: *ṛ*, *ai*, *au*, and *visarga*: *ḥ*.

C. **Thai**

The following system is used for phonetically rendering Thai into Roman script.

i. Tone marks are not indicated.

ii. When the repeat symbol ๆ is used the syllable is written twice.

iii. The symbol ฯลฯ is written la.

iv. Thai consonants are sometimes purely consonantal and sometimes followed by an inherent vowel, which is written o, a or or depending on the pronounciation, e.g. คน - khon, ขนม - khanom, ก - kor.

v. Silent consonants with their accompanying vowels, if any, are not written, e.g. ฤทธิ์ - rit.

vi. When the pronunciation requires one consonant to serve a double function, at the end of one syllable and at the beginning of the next, it is written twice according to its pronunciation, e.g. ทัศนะ - thatsana.

vii. In four common words อ occurs preceding another consonant to mark a tone, and is then not written, i.e. อย่า - yà, อยาก - yàk, อย่าง - yàng, อยู่ - yù.

viii. When ห precedes another consonant to mark a tone it is not written, e.g. หมาย - mày.

Using these principles the Thai alphabet is represented by the following characters:

i. **Consonants.**

		Initial and Medial.	Final.
ก	-	k	k
ข, ค, ฆ	-	kh	k
ง	-	ng	ng
จ	-	c	t

ฉ, ช, ฌ	-	ch	t
ซ	-	s	t
ญ	-	y	n
ด, ฎ, ฑ	-	d	t
ต, ฏ	-	t	t
ถ, ฐ, ท, ฑ, ธ, ฒ	-	th	t
ทร	-	s	t
ณ, น	-	n	n
บ	-	b	p
ป	-	p	p
ผ, พ, ภ	-	ph	p
ฝ, ฟ	-	f	p
ม	-	m	m
ย	-	y	-
ร	-	r	n
ล, ฬ	-	l	n
ว	-	w	-
ศ, ษ, ส	-	s	t
ห, ฮ	-	h	-

ii. **Vowels and Diphthongs.**

ฤ	- ry, ri, roe.	ฤา	- rŷ.
อว	- ủa.	อวย	- ủay.
ออ	- ỏr.	ออย	- ỏy.
อะ	- a.	อั	- a.
อัย	- ay.	อัว	- ủa.
อัวะ	- ua.	อา	- ả.
อาย	- ảy.	อาว	- ảw.

อำ	- am.	อิ	- i.
อิว	- iw.	อี	- ī.
อึ	- y.	อื	- ȳ.
อุ	- u.	อุย	- uy.
อู	- ū.	เอ	- ē.
เอ็	- e.	เอย	- ōēy.
เอว	- ēw.	เอ็ว	- ew.
เออ	- ōē.	เออะ	- oe.
เอะ	- e.	เอา	- au.
เอาะ	- or.	เอิ	- ōē.
เอีย	- īa.	เอียะ	- ia.
เอียว	- īaw.	เอือ	- ȳa.
เอือะ	- ya.	เอือย	- ȳay.
แอ	- āē.	แอว	- āēw.
แอะ	- ae.	โอ	- ō.
โอะ	- o.	ใอ	- ai.
ไอ	- ai.	ไอย	- ai.

Except where there is an established convention, such as where Thai authors have already decided on the spelling of their names in English, Thai terms are presented as such and not in the Pali and Sanskritised forms sometimes used. Where in quotations from English language sources other authors have followed different transliteration systems their slight variations are retained. What differences do result are few and minor and easily traceable. In keeping with their traditional canonical and literary languages Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhist technical terms are written in this text in their Pali and Sanskrit forms respectively. For example,

the Pali term *nibbāna* here always refers to the Theravāda notion of salvation while the related Sanskrit term *nirvāṇa* is always used to refer to ultimate salvation as conceived within Mahāyāna Buddhism. These linguistic differences are retained because such cognate terms often have different nuances in the two traditions, the most notable example in this work being the differences between the notion of "voidness" in Theravāda Buddhism (Pali: *suññatā*) and in Mahāyāna Buddhism (Sanskrit: *s'ūnyatā*) discussed in Chapter Seven. I do not follow the custom of many authors who give Theravāda technical terms in artificial Sanskrit forms, but where in quotations and references other authors have used Sanskrit forms for Theravāda terms those forms are kept for accuracy's sake[1].

Below is a short list of some of the most common Pali terms used in this work and their cognate Sanskrit forms sometimes used as alternatives.

PALI.	SANSKRIT.
attā	*ātman*
cakkavattin	*cakravartin*
dhamma	*dharma*
jhāna	*dhyāna*
kamma	*karma*
nibbāna	*nirvāṇa*
sutta	*sūtra*
tipiṭaka	*tripiṭaka*

To avoid confusion Thai words transliterated into Roman script are underlined while Pali and Sanskrit words are italicised. Proper names of persons, organisations, religious sects or places given in either Pali or Thai are capitalised but not underlined or italicised.

In keeping with the analytical focus on Thai Buddhism in this work references to and quotations from the *Tipiṭaka*, the canonical Theravāda scriptures, are wherever possible taken from the Thai version of the canon. Throughout this work all references to the *Tipiṭaka* are to the forty five volume *Phra Traipidok Phāsā Thai Chabap Lūang* (พระไตรปิฎกภาษาไทยฉบับหลวง *The Official Thai Language Edition of the Tipiṭaka*) published by the Thai Department of Religious Affairs or Krom Kānsāsānā (กรมการศาสนา) in B.E. 2525

[1]Pali is a language closely related to Sanskrit, probably being a vernacular in Northern India soon after the time of the historical Buddha. While Pali is the classical language of the Theravāda scriptures some authors tend to give Theravāda terms in their equivalent Sanskrit forms. This custom is artificial and has no theoretical justification other than indicating an assumed greater stature of Sanskrit, the classical language of Hinduism and of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India.

(A.D. 1982)[2]. In referring to this Thai edition of the *Tipiṭaka* I follow the Thai system of citing sections of the scriptures or *suttas* by: volume/verse/page[3]. In a very few places where it was deemed appropriate the Pali Text Society's English translations of the *Tipiṭaka* have been referred to instead of the Thai version.

2 Footnoting and Bibliographical System.

In the text I follow the custom of using the first names of Thai nationals as the formal form of address, although in most cases both given and family names are used for clarity's sake. For non-Thais I follow the Western custom of using surnames as the formal form of address. For example the Thai author Sulak Sivaraksa is referred to as Sulak while the English author Trevor Ling is referred to as Ling.

Because of the diversity and varied nature of the Thai and English language sources referred to in this work and because of the different bibliographical conventions used for describing works in the two languages I have had to use special footnoting and bibliographical systems capable of fully documenting my source materials. Two separate bibliographies are listed at the end of this book, the first for English language materials referred to in the text and the second for Thai materials. References in the body of the text to Thai language materials as well as quotations which I have translated from Thai sources are marked with a bracketed capital T, i.e. (T), indicating that the relevant bibliographical details are found in the Thai language bibliography. All Thai language bibliographical details, both in the bibliography and in footnotes, are given in Thai script as well as being transliterated into Roman script. The translated titles of Thai works are also given in brackets. Following the Thai custom, materials in the Thai language bibliography are arranged in Thai alphabetical order according to the author's first name, not according to the author's surname.

Some Thai authors cited below have written books both in English and in Thai. Such Thai language works are listed alphabetically in Thai according to the author's first name, while the same author's English language works are alphabetically listed in the English language bibliography according to his or her surname. To help avoid confusion the name under which bibliographical information is listed is always printed in bold type in footnotes.

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[2]Thailand uses the Buddhist calendar, dating from the Buddha's death in 543 B.C. The year A.D. 1986 is in the Buddhist Era (B.E.) the year 2529.

[3]lem/khȯr/nȧ เล่ม/ข้อ/หน้า

e.g.

Sulak **Sivaraksa** - English language bibliography.

Sulak Siwarak - Thai language bibliography.

Many Thai authors and personalities prefer to spell their names in English according to the Thai spelling rather than according to the actual pronunciation. Because Thai names often include silent letters when written in Thai script such English versions often vary significantly from the actual pronunciation. For example, the monk referred to in this work as Buddhadāsa, which is that monk's own preferred spelling of his name in English, is in Thai referred to as Phutthathāt, and the monk Rājavaramunī is referred to in Thai as Rātchaworamunī. Where a person has already decided on the English spelling of his or her name I respect that non-phonetic convention in the body of the text and in footnoting and bibliographical details for his or her English language works. However, to retain such non-phonetic conventions when detailing Thai language materials would introduce severe contradictions and breach the Thai alphabetical ordering of the Thai language bibliography. Consequently, in the bibliographical details given for the Thai language works of such authors in the Thai language bibliogrpahy and in footnotes all names are spelt according to the phonetic transliteration system detailed above. Some of the most common differences in the spelling of Thai names found in this text are listed below:

ENGLISH CONVENTION.	PHONETIC THAI SPELLING.
Buddhadāsa	Phutthathāt
Bodhiraks'a	Phōthirak
Khukrit Pramot	Khykrit Prāmōt
Rājavaramunī	Rātchworamunī
Sulak Sivaraksa	Sulak Siwarak

INTRODUCTION.

1 The Goals of This Study.

Since the early 1970s the thought of the aging Buddhist monk Buddhadāsa[1] has become a primary focus of theoretical and doctrinal discussions of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand. Buddhadāsa began a systematic re-appraisal and re-interpretation of Theravāda Buddhist doctrine in 1932 and some of his sermons and articles were published in local Buddhist journals in the 1930s and 1940s. However, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, in particular during the brief, turbulent period of civilian government from 1973 until 1976, that Buddhadāsa's ideas found a broader national audience in Thailand. This is because it has only been during the last couple of decades in response to the rapid socio-economic development of the country that considerable numbers of fellow Thais have come to share the modernist and reformist views on Buddhism that Buddhadāsa has been propounding for over fifty years. By his supporters and followers Buddhadāsa has been hailed as a progressive reformer and even a genius. His critics, however, have labelled him a dangerous heretic whose work subverts both the teachings of the Buddha and the national institution of Buddhism in Thailand.

But whatever the status of such conflicting claims and accusations it is nevertheless still the case that no detailed study of the interpretation of Buddhist doctrine in Thailand today can omit a consideration of Buddhadāsa's views without being left deficient and inadequate. This is true whether one's interest lies in the area of Buddhist doctrine and contemporary accounts of the notions of salvation and spiritual practice, or whether one's concern is with more pragmatic issues such as debates on the proper role of Buddhist monks and laypeople in modern Thai society, for Buddhadāsa's re-interpretative work covers all areas of Buddhist doctrine and practice. Indeed Buddhadāsa's life work can be seen as an attempt to develop an ordered and thorough modernist re-interpretation of the entire body of Theravāda

[1] Buddhadāsa is the Pali spelling of the name. In Thai Buddhadāsa is called Phutthathāt (พุทธทาส) or in full Phra Phutthathāt Phikkhu. Both of the Thai terms phra (พระ) and phikkhu (ภิกขุ Pali: *bhikkhu*) denote a Buddhist monk and are variously used as honorifics in combination with a monk's actual name.

doctrine, including both the soteriological and the social aspects of Buddhist teachings. Not since the *Visuddhimagga* and other related commentaries written by Buddhaghosa in Ceylon in the fifth century of the Christian era has there been such a comprehensive attempt to systematically re-interpret the entirety of Theravāda doctrine in the light of contemporary views and expectations.

I believe that both the theoretical and social implications of Buddhadāsa's work are of equal importance, and that it is necessary to consider both aspects in any attempt at analysing or interpreting the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of his half century of scholarly activity. Consequently I take the starting point of this analysis to be the total phenomenon of Buddhadāsa and his re-interpretative work, a phenomenon which at one and the same time has theoretical and doctrinal as well as social and political significance in contemporary Thailand. It is my goal in the following chapters to develop a subtle and complex analysis adequate to the task of both describing and evaluating this complex phenomenon. More specifically the goal of this work is, firstly, to delineate and systematically describe the details of Buddhadāsa's doctrinal re-interpretations and, secondly, to evaluate the import and significance of his views and theories for Theravāda Buddhist thought.

It is necessary to devote a significant part of this work to the straightforward presentation of Buddhadāsa's views, because no systematic overview or account of the details of his various theories and doctrinal re-interpretations has yet been published in either Thai or any European language. In order to evaluate Buddhadāsa's theoretical and socio-political importance it has first been necessary to construct from his voluminous writings - including pamphlets, theoretical tracts as well as reports of his many talks and sermons - an overview of his arguments and the theoretical emphases and foci of his work. Buddhadāsa himself has not presented a summary or guide to the total system of his views which has rather developed organically over the decades. The various theoretical foci respectively chosen as the bases of the following chapters are my own interpretation of what Buddhadāsa has said and argued, and while I consider them to be the core of his views other readers and critics could no doubt have chosen other concepts or theoretical points about which to articulate an alternative account of his system of doctrinal re-interpretation.

The theoretical foci of Buddhadāsa's work which I have chosen as the bases of my account and critical analysis of his views are:

(1) Buddhadāsa's theory of scriptural interpretation, called <u>phāsākhon - phāsātham</u> (Chapter Three),

(2) his criticisms of traditionally accepted canonical scriptures and commentaries, especially the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and the *Visuddhimagga* (Chapter Four),

(3) his re-interpreted theory of salvation based on the notion of cit-wâng, "voided mind" or "freed mind" (Chapter Five),

(4) the system of practices presented as leading to the attainment of salvation or *nibbâna* by the development of cit-wâng (Chapter Six),

(5) the influence of Zen and Mahâyâna Buddhist notions on his re-interpretations of Theravâda doctrine (Chapter Seven),

(6) the social doctrine that emerges from Buddhadâsa's system of thought (Chapter Eight) and,

(7) Buddhadâsa's specific comments on and criticisms of political activity and political involvement (Chapter Nine).

In re-interpreting the totality of Theravâda doctrine Buddhadâsa is fundamentally concerned to shift the focus of Thai Buddhism from the transcendent to this world and to incorporate the hopes and aspirations of Thai laymen and laywomen into Buddhism by conferring religious value on action in the social world. But to do this Buddhadâsa must move the entire theoretical structure of Buddhism, or to use another structural metaphor, he must rebuild Buddhist doctrine upon the new theoretical foundations that he lays. In this work I wish to consider the entirety of this theoretical reconstruction of Buddhism, to follow and evaluate the overall contours of the new vision of Buddhism revealed in Buddhadâsa's work, and also to reveal the major structural weaknesses of this new edifice.

At numerous points in the following chapters the analytical movement of tracing the general development of Buddhadâsa's total system work could easily have stopped in order to concentrate on any one of the many specific issues raised by his doctrinal re-interpretations. By taking up each of these various issues in detail each of the chapters that follow could easily have been expanded to a size equivalent to that of this complete study. However, this temptation to stop the general analytical movement of the study in order to concentrate on details has had to be systematically resisted in many places, and in this study I have only detailed Buddhadâsa's work to an extent that I regard as sufficient to demonstrate the import of the specific points and issues treated and to show their place in his work. Because of the broad scope of this study the reader may sometimes feel frustrated that a certain idea or suggestion is not developed further. However, a high degree of descriptive and analytical economy has had to be maintained throughout in order to keep the focus of this study on the whole "forest" of Buddhadâsa's work rather than diverting to observe individual conceptual "trees" in too great detail.

2 Methodological Approaches I: A Social and Philosophical Analysis.

While it is important to isolate the conceptual and theoretical pivots upon which Buddhadāsa constructs his system (these pivots forming the bases for the following chapters as briefly delineated above) a simple study of the explicit details of Buddhadāsa's thought would not reveal its full significance. It is equally important that from any account of the explicit details of Buddhadāsa's system the underlying and often implicit themes which provide the structuring and consistency-giving framework to his broad and diverse body of thought are also clearly revealed. The many details of Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations, the relations between concepts and the significance of particular notions and ideas are not all self-evident. I suggest that the significance of his theories and ideas is often only able to be clearly comprehended when their relation to general underlying themes whose provenance lies outside of Buddhism - in the contemporary changes in society, economy, education and cultural expectations which are transforming Thailand - is made manifest.

Underlying all of Buddhadāsa's detailed theoretical re-interpretations are two broad and often implicit themes. The first is Buddhadāsa's desire for Buddhist teachings to conform to what he regards as modern rational and scientific standards of argumentation and analysis. This desire is demonstrated most forcefully in his systematic demythologisation of Buddhist doctrine and in his reduction of all supernatural conditions and non-empirical entities described in the Buddhist scriptures to psychological states. Buddhadāsa re-interprets the entire traditional cosmology and soteriology of Theravāda Buddhism, which involves successive rebirths over eons in an elaborately structured cosmos of heavens and hells, as occurring within the mental scope of human beings alive on earth here and now. The second and related theme informing Buddhadāsa's work is his wish for Buddhism to maintain its social relevance in contemporary Thailand in the face of rapid socio-economic development and cultural change. Buddhadāsa believes Buddhism should demonstrate its ongoing relevance to human life and aspirations by functioning as a moral and ideological basis for action in the social world which simultaneously integrates and promotes both progressive social development and the individual attainment of spiritual salvation.

Each of these themes, the desire for discursive modernism or rationalism and for contemporary social relevance, represents a radical departure from traditional Theravāda teachings and in order to develop and justify his radical views and analyses within the conservative Thai Buddhist context Buddhadāsa has been forced to take an equally radical approach to the interpretation of doctrine. In order to

demonstrate the full significance of Buddhadâsa's thought the details of his doctrinal re-interpretations, in addition to being analysed in terms of their explicit conceptual relations, are in each chapter also related to these two general themes which fundamentally inform and determine the character of his work.

The sources of Buddhadâsa's theoretical concern with discursive modernism and with the social relevance of religion lie outside of Buddhist doctrine as such in the realm of contemporary social relations and social change. As will be argued in Chapter Two Buddhadâsa's work owes much to the impact of Western notions of science and rationality. His ideas can also be seen as a response to the cultural and religious challenges presented by socio-economic development and modernisation in Thailand. Consequently, it is impossible to limit this study to a purely theoretical or philosophical analysis. While necessarily reliant upon the norms, assumptions and precedents of the tradition of doctrinal interpretation in Thailand, Buddhadâsa's views go far beyond the historically defined bounds of that theoretical and doctrinal tradition. As already suggested the extra-religious influences on Buddhadâsa's thought, as expressed in the general underlying themes outlined above, are an essential element of his re-interpretation of Buddhism. In presenting and evaluating his work it is therefore as important to appreciate the character of the extra-religious or social influences on Buddhadâsa as it is to understand the details of the historical tradition of Buddhist doctrinal interpretation which is the immediate source of the specific concepts and notions that he details. That is, the methodology of any study of Buddhadâsa's work must match the actual character of that work by integrating both social and philosophical analytical approaches.

A combined social and philosophical study of Buddhadâsa's work, or for that matter the work of any Thai Buddhist thinker, is also necessary because of the concrete character of Thai Buddhism. Buddhist doctrine is part of the living tradition of Thai Buddhism, which in turn is arguably the most important cultural institution in Thai society. The teachings of Buddhism and the formal institution of the monkhood or *saṅgha* remain the basis not only of everyday social relations in Thailand but also of the Thai political structure and the related religio-political institution of the Thai monarchy. In developing a comprehensive analysis of any aspect of Buddhism in Thailand, not only of Buddhadâsa's specific re-interpretations, it is necessary to recognise explicitly that Thai Buddhism exists in a dynamic relation with Thai society, and has political, cultural and ideological as well as purely religious importance.

A purely theoretical study of Buddhadâsa's work which focussed solely on his ideas would artificially abstract those ideas from the social context which has to a

large extent informed them and in which they have become an object of public debate, finding both adherents and critics. On the other hand, a study which focussed solely on the social sources and impact of Buddhadâsa's work would not give sufficient weight to the fact that it is his ideas, presented as a continuation of a long-standing religious tradition, and not his actions in either the political or social spheres which are the object of public debate in Thailand. A combined theoretical and a social analysis of Buddhadâsa's work is therefore required in order to delineate fully its features and significance. This study, then, is an attempt to develop a socially informed evaluation of the totality of Buddhadâsa's re-interpretations of Buddhist doctrine; it is an analysis of doctrine which considers:

(1) the social context of Buddhadâsa's theoretical work,

(2) the relation of Buddhadâsa's doctrinal re-interpretations to the history of the theoretical tradition of Theravâda Buddhism, and

(3) the views and reactions of Buddhadâsa's audience and readership, in other words, the social impact of, and response to, his ideas.

A second, related goal of this study, in addition to that of providing a combined social-theoretical account of both the explicit details and general themes of Buddhadâsa's views, is to evaluate those views and the arguments Buddhadâsa uses to support them. Because of the combined social-philosophical analytical approach taken here I consider any evaluation of his work which focusses solely on the strict logical consistency of his arguments or on the validity of his views in terms of canonical or traditional presentations of Theravâda doctrine to be inadequate. On the other hand I also regard as inadequate any evaluation from a social or pragmatic perspective which judges Buddhadâsa solely in in terms of say the popularity of his ideas or their "efficacy" in initiating or leading to concrete social or political results. At the same time I regard both these theoretical and practical criteria as important and needing to be incorporated into any serious evaluation of Buddhadâsa's work. As a theoretical system which has social importance, an evaluation of Buddhadâsa's total system of doctrinal re-interpretation must combine specific judgements on the system's theoretical validity and logical consistency together with judgements of its social impact. To damn Buddhadâsa's total system because of certain theoretical inconsistencies despite its having a major social impact, or, conversely, to dismiss it because it lacks practical efficacy even though it may be a thorough and consistent interpretation of Theravâda doctrine, are, in my opinion, both unacceptable positions. Because Buddhadâsa's re-interpretations of Theravâda doctrine constitute a complex social and theoretical phenomenon any

evaluation of that work as a whole must mirror that complexity and avoid simplistic or monovalent judgements.

By recognising the actual complexity of Thai Buddhism and of Buddhadāsa's work as simultaneously being sociological and theoretical phenomena it is my wish in this study to approach the study of doctrinal modernisation in Thailand in a more realistic way. I do not intend to artificially divide up my object of study according to the theoretical and methodological lines of the institutionalised academic disciplines of Western universities. Rather I wish to treat Buddhadāsa's re-interpretative work as the given, and my theoretical approach to that body of work as the variable to be modified in accordance with the actual complex character of that object. I want to avoid a common and unfortunate consequence of uncritically accepting the divisions between academic disciplines, namely the taking of a methodological approach peculiar to a certain discipline as the determinant of one's study, a manner of research which often oversimplifies and fails to appreciate the theoretical and social complexity of cultural phenomena.

The theoretical study of Buddhism by Westerners has historically suffered from attempts to make it fit within the disciplinary boundaries of European philosophy. The "Buddhism" sections of university libraries are replete with theoretical studies such as, "Remarks on Early Buddhist Proto-formalism"[2], "The *Anattā* Doctrine and Personal Identity"[3], "The Buddhist Doctrine of Two Truths"[4], and so on. But while Buddhism is indeed a theoretical system and a philosophy, it is also much more. Unlike Western philosophy, which is by and large an academic activity, the issues of Buddhist thought are part of the cultural context of Buddhist societies. To study Buddhism as if it were just a system of thought, along with say Platonism, Existentialism, Structuralism or Behaviourism is to ignore the fact that unlike these intellectual schools Buddhism provides the foundation of the political structure, social ethics and world view of Buddhist societies. Only in this century have Buddhist societies begun to experience the segregation of activities into the religious and the secular which has characterised Western societies for several centuries. Philosophy, as understood and practised in the West today, is an intellectual product of a society in which there is a strong compartmentalisation of religious,

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[2]Douglas Dunmore Daye, "Remarks on Early Buddhist Proto-formalism (Logic) and Mr Tachikawa's Translation of the *Nyāyapraves'a*", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.3, 1975, pp.383-398.

[3]Richard Taylor, "The *Anattā* Doctrine and Personal Identity", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. XIX No.4, October 1969, pp.359-366.

[4]Frederick J. Streng, "The Buddhist Doctrine of Two Truths as Religious Philosophy", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.1, 1970-72, pp.262-271.

political and secular intellectual activities. In Thailand, these divisions are much weaker and less clearly defined. For this reason attempts to analyse Thai Buddhist philosophy, Thai politics or Thai society in isolation introduces the intellectual and social divisions of our own society into a situation in which they do not apply. It is possible to study Buddhist philosophy, but only if it is analysed in the context of Buddhist societies and the polities of those societies.

3 Methodological Approaches II: Sympathetic Engagement.

In evaluating Buddhadāsa's work it is necessary to recognise that his doctrinal re-interpretations are part of a non-Western intellectual tradition. Buddhism is a religious tradition with a distinct theoretical history in which notions of argumentation, methods of reasoning and even the place of reason in human knowledge differ markedly from the situation in the Western tradition. For these reasons it is not possible to criticise or evaluate Theravāda Buddhism using precisely the same intellectual tools used to critically assess Western theoretical and philosophical tracts. To uncritically apply Western analytical criteria to Buddhism may lead to the fundamental differences in the character of Buddhist thought being perceived as theoretical weaknesses and logical deficiencies, a result which may in fact unnecessarily and unjustifiably undervalue or even devalue that system of thought. What are in fact differences in the respective theoretical character of Buddhist doctrine and Western philosophical writings may be perceived as "inadequacies" by those trained in one system or the other if the existence of fundamental discursive differences is not acknowledged.

In this regard it is not only the case that Western theoreticians using theoretical criteria specific to their own tradition may perceive Buddhism's theoretical differences as inadequacies. Buddhists may also see what Westerners take as fundamental aspects of their intellectual tradition as inadequacies or theoretical deficiencies when judged by Buddhist criteria. For example, Buddhadāsa himself criticises the Western valuation of free enquiry and the operation of reason and rational analysis free of religio-moral constraints. In Buddhist intellectual culture reason is always subordinate to the religious quest for *nibbāna* or salvation from suffering, rational enquiry not directly dealing with issues concering salvation not being sanctioned. Buddhadāsa criticises the West as being a culture which emphasises intellectualising and philosophy rather than encouraging the practical cultivation of wisdom, which in Buddhism is regarded as the foundation of attaining salvation from the miseries of human existence. In his words the West, "is drunk

and addicted to philosophy [i.e. free rational enquiry] like a spiritual heroin."(T)[5]

To insist on applying a strict Western critical analysis to all theoretical systems, even those developed in non-Western societies, fails to recognise that significantly different discursive systems do in fact operate upon different theoretical, logical and epistemological principles. This point is developed further when discussing the place of reason in Buddhist thought, already briefly alluded to above, in Chapter Two. What from a Western perspective may be perceived as deficiencies in Buddhist theorising may, in terms of the principles of Buddhist doctrine, itself be a wholly adequate argument or interpretation. A strictly logical (Western) analysis of Buddhadâsa's thought would lead to an unwarranted concentration on the details and specific intellectual failings of his work. But such a strict logical analysis would utterly fail to recognise that when viewed in the context of the principles and intellectual history of Theravâda Buddhist thought Buddhadâsa's system cannot but be seen as an important theoretical development with profound implications.

But just as an unqualified Western-styled critique of Buddhadâsa's thought is unacceptable (because it would fail to appreciate the distinct character of Buddhist intellectual activity and the socio-historical context of Buddhadâsa's work) so too would a solely contextual or internal study which completely abandoned or held in abeyance criteria of discursive criticism be an inadequate theoretical approach. To define Buddhism as a system to which one cannot apply Western notions of logical argumentation would be to deny the possibility of a Western student developing an evaluation or judgement of Buddhist thought which has theoretical significance within the context of Western discourse and intellectual history.

This poses the question of whether Buddhist thought can in any theoretically significant sense be an object of Western philosophical analysis. In Western intellectual history Buddhist doctrine and thought have traditionally been the theoretical objects of the disciplines of religious studies, anthropology and comparative studies in the history of ideas. All of these disciplines can be described as following an "observational" methodology in which the aim is to describe, explicate and account for the characteristics of the object of study whilst declining to engage or intervene in that object. The observational or "objective" method

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5 Phutthathāt (พุทธทาส), *Mūa Tham Khrōrng Lōk* ("เมื่อธรรมครองโลก" - *When Dhamma Governs the World*), Thammathān Mūlanithi (ธรรมทานมูลนิธิ), Chaiya Thailand, 2522 (1979), pp.139ff. N.b. In this same book Buddhadāsa also criticises the Western emphasis on individualism in intellectual, artistic and cultural activities, saying this results is confusion and social decay. He also criticises what he sees as a Western over-concern for individual political rights and democratic freedoms which is devoid of a concept of the moral responsibility needed before such freedoms can be properly utilised, i.e. directed towards the attainment of *nibbāna*.

which has been the historically dominant method in anthropology and religious studies involves an attempt on the part of the student to avoid commitment to the beliefs and values of the foreign culture being studied and so to avoid judging that cultural system. The dominance of these observational disciplines in Buddhist studies since the second half of the last century can perhaps be explained in historical terms. Western academics' reluctance to judge or evaluate Buddhist doctrine may be an attempt to avoid the self-righteous, judgemental and morally unpalatable criticisms early missionaries and other European travellers made of what they saw as the "barbaric" beliefs and practices of the "pagans", while still allowing some scope for an insatiable Western intellectual curiosity.

I support the methodological approach of the observational disciplines to the extent that it recognises the existence of structural differences between the theoretical systems of different cultures. The simple observational method, however, has severe limitations when viewed from the perspective of the discipline of philosophy. Unlike the practitioners of the observational disciplines those engaged in the intellectual activity of philosophy rarely have any qualms about engaging their objects of concern. A philosophy which sought to avoid evaluating or theoretically engaging its object would have lost an important aspect if not the most important aspect of what has historically characterised Western philosophical activity. Philosophy is not a discipline which merely observes its objects dispasssionately but as it has developed in Western intellectual history is an inherently interventionist discourse which seeks active participation in the issues, debates and arguments presented, assumed or implied in theoretical systems.

To approach Buddhism with such a Western philosophical method might, in terms of the criticism of one-sided Western analyses of Buddhism mentioned above, be regarded as a form of theoretical imperialism, arrogantly breaching the autonomy of a non-Western system of thought by assuming that that system should be amenable to a Western mode of analysis. In recent years the promotion of the notion of epistemological relativism by critics such as Paul Feyerabend[6], a development of earlier notions of linguistic and cultural relativism, can be seen as an attempt to define epistemological limits to such universalising tendencies in Western philosophy and other critical Western discourses. Relativists have argued

[6]The term "epistemological relativism" is not one Feyerabend himself uses in his main text on relativism, *Against Method - Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (Verso, London, 1978), where he instead uses the term "incommensurability" (*Against Method*, p.223ff.). By incommensurability Feyerabend means that notions or theories in significantly different epistemological systems are strictly incomparable because their respective concepts and theoretical assumptions are drawn from the internal context of relations with other notions and theories within their originating or source epistemological system. According to this theory notions and theories cannot be appreciated in their original sense and import outside of their defining epistemological context.

against a philosophical or interventionist approach claiming, among other things, that when one theoretically intervenes in a foreign intellectual system one may end up not so much studying that foreign system of thought as the pattern of one's own theoretical interference in it.

Relativists have often incorporated a strong ethical component into their epistemological hypotheses. They have argued, whether explicitly or implicitly, that Western theoreticians should refrain from engaging foreign discourses as if they were simply variants of Western discourses in order to avoid imposing alien Western conceptions upon Third World or non-Western systems. Relativism has represented an epistemological expression of a much broader anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist polemic which has argued against Western political, economic and cultural domination of the Third World. In arguing for the epistemological autonomy and independence of non-Western theoretical systems (and of marginalised or suppressed systems of thought within the Western cultural tradition) by proposing that such systems can only be evaluated in terms of their own assumptions and within their own epistemological context relativism has not only attempted to define limits to Western intellectual activity but has also suggested that Westerners should voluntarily curb their theoretical and evaluative excursions into non-Western discourses. Relativism has thus functioned as an ethical epistemology arguing for a sense of responsibility in avoiding participating in acts of theoretical or cultural imperialism.

While the approach of epistemological relativism has laudable political and ethical bases, avoiding charges of participation in Western cultural and intellectual imperialism it would, if followed strictly, tend to lead to the definition of Buddhism and Western thought as two distinct, self-contained systems which cannot seriously or legitimately engage each others' views. In its extreme form this approach would deny Westerners the intellectual right to evaluate or comment on Buddhist notions, and **vice versa**. However, while supportive of the ethical and political goals of relativism and of maintaining the autonomy of non-Western theoretical systems I cannot accept the above extreme relativist position as realistic in the contemporary world. For to adopt an extreme relativist position would imply that I, a non-Thai and a non-Buddhist, cannot seriously engage or evaluate Buddhist thought. In observational disciplines such as anthropology this dilemma is in theory avoided by creating an evaluative or theoretical distance between the Western observer and the foreign "object" in an attempt to acknowledge and respect the foreign social or theoretical system.

But what the observational discourses (and I include the philosophical

approach of epistemological relativism here) do not acknowledge is the paradox that this respect is also inherently imbued with an implicit condescension which in its own way continues to devalue the foreign cultural and theoretical system. This is because the ethical component of relativist theories is based on the assumption that critical Western systems of thought are in fact dominating systems, whether inherently so or because they are part of the dominant material and political culture in the modern world. Relativist theories also make the corresponding assumption that foreign theoretical systems are weak, less powerful and susceptible to domination if not annihilation. In maintaining that one should not engage or judge a foreign theoretical system by using criteria derived from one's own cultural and intellectual context, because to do so would be epistemologically invalid and ethically unacceptable, one also imputes powerlessness to the foreign theoretical object and power to oneself by making the assumption that engagement would in fact be an act of theoretical imperialism, and an expression of a dominant intellectual power. However, the holding back from judgement which relativism and the observational approaches entail results in the isolation of foreign theoretical systems from our own and avoids the issue of how concrete interaction and engagement can or should occur. There is no true interaction with the object in the observational disciplines, as occurs between two independent and mutually respecting individuals. Rather the observational disciplines follow a zoological approach which categorises and isolates cultures and their associated theoretical systems, and is an approach which perpetuates the implied power inequality between Western and foreign cultural and theoretical systems.

In the case of Buddhism I regard it as necessary to question the assumption of the powerlessness of the foreign theoretical object and of the imperialising powerfulness of the Western observer or would-be-commentator. Is it not the case that the intellectual significance of Buddhist thought is demeaned by not seriously engaging it but instead approaching it with intellectual kid gloves? I maintain that the study of the emerging societies and economies of contemporary Asia requires a quite different intellectual approach from the traditional observational or anthropological methodology. I also suggest that in contrast to the earlier observational methods used in studying Asian societies there is a growing need for Western scholars to engage Asian theoretical systems, which in Western academic terms can be described as a philosophical rather than an anthropological approach. It is for this reason that I regard the critical and analytical methods of philosophy, when applied judiciously and with a sympathetic appreciation of the differences of foreign cultural systems, to be more appropriate to contemporary inter-cultural

studies than in the past when the avoidance of the intellectual trappings of colonialism dominated the methodologies of Western studies of Asia. To not engage Buddhism is in my opinion to patronisingly imply that that tradition is incapable of responding to Western evaluations or criticisms, an assumption I think is less valid if not invalid in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

There is an additional reason for a more interactive and less observational approach to the evaluation of Buddhadâsa's work which lies in the very character of his doctrinal reforms. As will be detailed in the following chapters, Buddhadâsa's re-interpretative work is not a "pure" Buddhist product, having been significantly influenced by Western theoretical and philosophical notions. For example, Buddhadâsa is explicitly interested in making Buddhist doctrine more scientific or at least not in contradiction with modern scientific theories. But in addition, underlying all his re-interpretations and demythologisations of traditional Buddhist teachings is an implicit rationalism and anti-metaphysical orientation which draws heavily on Western empiricist sources. While Buddhadâsa's work is in form continuous with the long history of Theravâda Buddhism, in character it represents a distinct break from that tradition, incorporating distinctly Western notions and emphases. To evaluate this Western-influenced but Theravâda-derived interpretation of Buddhism requires a clear appreciation of the relation of Buddhadâsa's system to its various sources and influences. Similarly, evaluating Buddhadâsa's work necessitates judging it according to both Western and Buddhist criteria, that is, according to secular and religious criteria. Buddhadâsa's Buddhism is in no sense traditional and any attempt to treat it as if it were the product of an isolated and completely foreign cultural context would fail to appreciate the significant Western influence and the extent of overlap with Western notions and concepts.

What is required in analysing Buddhadâsa's work is a critical approach to Buddhism which at the same time appreciates the significance of Buddhism in its own historical and theoretical context. This involves maintaining a balance between a critical analysis or theoretical engagement and a sympathetic understanding and appreciation of Buddhism in its own terms. A sympathetic engagement with Buddhism would seek neither to devalue that theoretical system because of its culturally determined differences nor to demean it by patronisingly holding criticism in abeyance and avoiding evaluative comment. A sympathetic understanding or engagement of Buddhism implies neither agreement with its theoretical assumptions nor the development of an apologetic for Buddhist doctrines. Instead sympathetic engagement represents a recognition of differences and, if necessary, an acknowledgement of the need to agree to disagree over fundamental values, but not

to either disparage Buddhism or refrain from further engagement because of these differences. Such an approach neither assumes that Buddhist doctrine is a perfectly consistent development of the religion's principles, nor does it refrain from making internal inconsistencies apparent where they in fact exist.

3.1 Sympathetic Engagement - Summary.

The approach of sympathetic engagement followed in this study is a two-pronged analysis. Engagement denotes analysing and criticising the details of arguments, the assumptions underpinning notions, the particulars of logic and reasoning. On the other hand, a sympathetic or contextual understanding denotes looking more at generalities, at the context of history and general theoretical principles which inform and pattern the particular details of doctrine and teaching. However, these two moments are not separate but occur in tandem, critical engagement being tempered by sympathetic or contextual awareness and similarly a cutting or critical edge to sympathetic understanding being maintained by critical engagement.

More specifically, the sympathetic engagement of Buddhadâsa's work means that it is criticised and evaluated both in terms of strictly Western criteria and in terms of its own internal Buddhist-derived principles. However, neither of these approaches dominates the other, the results of an external criticism always being weighed against a contextual appreciation of the issues at hand, and **vice versa**. No simple theoretical formula can be given for whether the external Western or internal Buddhist evaluation of Buddhadâsa's doctrinal re-interpretations should predominate or be the ultimate basis for making some single final judgement on the overall value and importance of his work. The reasons for this have already been given - any simple judgement is likely to represent the dominance of one discursive system's principles over the other, resulting in a loss of perspective. The method of sympathetic engagement does not and, as argued, in fact cannot define any precise theoretical relation between Buddhism and Western thought. Rather it is an ethical and political approach to the intellectual study of contemporary Thai Buddhism which aims towards a balance in theoretical evaluation. Sympathetic engagement can be likened to a methodology of diplomacy. Sympathetic engagement acknowledges that there are irreduceable theoretical differences and so tensions between Buddhism and Western thought, but neither retreats into a pure, non-judgemental observationalism because of these irresolveable theoretical tensions nor attempts the impossible task of resolving the theoretical tensions by appealling to some abstract or metaphysical unifying principle between cultures. Rather, like diplomats skilled

in the political arts of international relations, this method seeks to engage the foreign party and arrive at a balanced judgement which gives value and weight to both Western and Buddhist analyses of Buddhadāsa's work.

The methodological approach of this study is then complex in two senses. Firstly, it involves appreciating Buddhadāsa's work both as a theoretical system and as a social phenomenon. And secondly, this social-philosophical analysis is undertaken in a way that sympathetically engages Buddhadāsa's work, evaluating it both in terms of the Buddhist tradition from which it is drawn and the Western intellectual tradition which has significantly influenced it.

However, before beginning the detailed description and criticism of Buddhadāsa's re-intepretations in Chapter Three and subsequent chapters the first two chapters of this study will outline the historical and theoretical background of Buddhist discourse and the social, institutional placement of Buddhism in Thai society. These introductory chapters will provide the details necessary to arrive at balanced theoretical and socio-political appraisals of Buddhadāsa's work in later sections and chapters.

Throughout this study it is assumed that the reader will already be acquainted with the history and basic principles and doctrines of Buddhism. For those unfamiliar with the terminology and concepts of Buddhist thought a brief overview is presented in Appendix I at the end of this book.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOCIAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXTS OF BUDDHADASA'S WORK.

As stated in the Introduction it is not the goal of this work to study Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations of Theravāda doctrine in abstraction or to present a purely theoretical or internal analysis of his work. Rather, I intend to study and evaluate Buddhadāsa's writings in terms of both the theoretical tradition of Theravāda Buddhist doctrine and in terms of the impact of his work within institutional Buddhism in Thailand. In this chapter and the next I will present and detail the theoretical and social contexts of Buddhadāsa's work, providing the background and foundation for the detailed analyses and criticisms of his doctrinal re-interpretations which begin in Chapter Three.

Because Buddhadāsa's work is a complex social, political and theoretical phenomenon, in analysing his thought it is necessary to draw on the theoretical insights and analyses of several academic disciplines. In detailing the context of Buddhadāsa's work here and in Chapter Two I will refer to the work of political scientists, historians, sociologists as well as to the research of historians of ideas and students of Buddhist thought and religious studies. The specific accounts and analyses of Buddhism and of Thai social and political life presented in these first two chapters are not in themselves the results of original research. However, in relating these diverse findings and focussing them on the theoretical object of the work of Buddhadāsa I hope that a more comprehensive and integrated picture of the man and of his doctrinal re-interpretations is developed than has previously been presented by more narrowly defined academic studies of Thai Buddhism.

The theoretical tradition of Buddhist studies in Thailand and the other Theravāda countries differs significantly from the Western intellectual tradition. For example, there is in Theravāda Buddhism a relatively greater emphasis on correct practice or orthopraxy as the basis of authoritative presentations of doctrine rather than on the notion of correct belief or orthodoxy, such as has traditionally underpinned the interpretation of religious doctrine in Western countries. This emphasis on correct practice as opposed to correct belief has to an extent led to a

relatively free and unrestricted approach to doctrinal interpretation, and in contrast with the intellectual history of Christianity the concern with heresy, for example, has been unimportant in Buddhist countries. However, this relative freedom in the realm of doctrine (always associated with strict conservatism in religious practice) has not as might perhaps be expected led to the development of a dynamic intellectual culture in Theravâda countries such as Thailand. On the contrary, the history of Buddhist intellectual culture in Thailand until this century can only be described as conservative and even as stagnant. At least two important factors lie behind the relative historical stagnation of Buddhist scholarship in Thailand. Firstly, the unrestricted operation of reason, or free rational enquiry into Buddhist doctrine or other topics, has not been regarded as being a "profitable" or appropriate intellectual activity. Secondly, Theravâda Buddhism's historical function as the national ideology of the strongly centralised Thai state has been associated with the imposition of political controls on the religion, which have in turn restricted and inhibited doctrinal and theoretical innovation. In this chapter I detail these points, i.e. the emphasis on practice in Theravâda Buddhism, the devaluation of reason, and the imposition of political controls on Thai Buddhism, which together constitute the most important features of Buddhadâsa's intellectual and socio-cultural context.

1.1 The Historical Conservatism of Thai Buddhism.

While Buddhadâsa's reworking of traditional Buddhist teachings is in itself a theoretically complex and detailed phenomenon I do not regard the most outstanding feature of his work to lie in any specific theory or re-interpretation of doctrine, but rather in the fact that he has attempted such a radical and systematic review of Theravâda Buddhism at all. Those accustomed to the critical and analytical emphasis of Western intellectual culture tend to take intellectual innovation and theoretical speculation for granted. However, theoretical novelty or innovativeness in doctrinal interpretation has not historically been a feature of Thai intellectual life. The interpretation of Buddhist teachings has in particular been a static area, the primary concern of Buddhist scholars (who up until this century were always monks) being with the conservation and faithful reproduction of holy texts and established commentarial interpretations from one generation to the next.

This conservatism in the study of Buddhist teachings in Thailand is perhaps in part the result of historical factors. By the time the Thais formally adopted Theravâda Buddhism, sometime around the twelfth or thirteenth century of the Christian era, the religion was already eighteen hundred years old. The scriptures had been determined and recorded, first in Ceylon, commentaries had been written

and patterns of religious practice and organisation had long since been systematised. In a sense all that was required of the relatively newly converted Thai Buddhists was to maintain and faithfully reproduce the given forms of practice and teaching, and preservation of the already fixed doctrines became the predominant concern of the official Buddhist hierarchy of monks in Thailand.

But this simple historical explanation is inadequate to account for the intellectual conservatism of traditional Thai Theravâda culture. The fact that a religious or theoretical tradition has a significant history does not in itself mean that that tradition is incapable of further development or innovation. Indeed Buddhism as a whole can in no sense be called an inherently static intellectual system for around the same time the Thais were adopting Theravâda Buddhism in Southeast Asia the schools of Chan and Zen were foci of religious and intellectual innovation in Buddhist China and Japan. And at an earlier period there had been intellectual ferment in Tibet as local beliefs and practices interacted and fused with North Indian Buddhism to produce the distinctly Tibetan Buddhist tradition called Vajrayâna. There is therefore nothing self-evident in Thai Buddhism's long history of doctrinal conservatism. The very fact that Buddhism elsewhere and in other periods has been characterised by innovation and reform, and that Buddhadâsa's work represents so radical an outbreak of re-interpretative activity within the long stagnant Thai tradition, indicate that Thai Buddhism's historical conservatism is in need of further explanation.

In this chapter the explication of the social and intellectual context of Buddhadâsa's work will at the same time incorporate an account of the conservatism of Thai Buddhism against which his work, even with its flaws, contrasts so strongly as an innovative and original contribution to Buddhist thought. In Chapter Two I will outline the sources of Buddhadâsa's innovativeness and the reasons for the recent irruption of a critical and reformist approach to doctrinal interpretation within the tradition of Thai Buddhism. As already suggested above the static character of traditional Thai Buddhist approaches to doctrine has multiple roots which lie both in the intellectual tradition of Theravâda Buddhism and in the history of Buddhism's institutional role in the Thai socio-political order.

1.2 Orthopraxy - Orthodoxy.

While an oversimplification, one can when analysing a religious tradition separate out the doctrines and teachings from the practices. This simple conceptual segregation is useful in accounting for the relative historical lack of concern for matters of doctrine and for the doctrinal conservatism of Theravâda Buddhism in

Thailand. When one compares Buddhism with say the Christian tradition it is clear that the relative significance placed upon doctrine and upon practice in the two systems is markedly different. In the Christian tradition questions of orthodoxy or correct view and correct belief have always been highly important points of dispute and conflict. But as Kirsch observes, when the history of Theravâda Buddhism is reviewed one finds that,

> disputes within the Theravâda Buddhist tradition have rarely focussed on doctrinal questions. More commonly, disputes have taken place within the *saṅgha* [monkhood] and have centred on questions of monastic discipline.[1]

Kirsch provides a Thai example, noting that the main differences between the two nikây (นิกาย) or sects of Buddhism in Thailand, the traditional Mahânikây (มหานิกาย) Sect and the Thammayut (ธรรมยุต) Sect established by King Mongkut or Rama IV (1850-1868) are based not on conflicting interpretations of doctrine or teaching but on divergent interpretations of correct clerical practice. The differences between the two nikây concern matters such as the proper format of initiation into the *saṅgha*, the manner of accepting almsfood, methods of physically dealing with money and the manner of wearing the monk's robes. The significance of issues of religious discipline and practice in Thai religious and political history can be gauged from Kirsch's observation that King Rama III (1830-1851) did not sponsor Mongkut, his half brother, to be king after him because he felt Mongkut would cause religious dissension. Rama III was afraid that Mongkut would impose his Thammayut Sect's practice of wearing the monks robes so as to cover both shoulders on the Mahânikây monks, who had traditionally worn their robes so as to cover only one shoulder.

In the context of an analysis of Hinduism Staal has called a religious emphasis on correct practice "orthopraxy"[2], as opposed to correct belief or orthodoxy. Staal argues that the orthopractic emphasis of Hinduism is related to the stress placed on the ritualistic aspect of the doctrine of *karma* or the belief that, "only the correct performance of *karman*, 'ritual activity', will lead to the desired result (e.g. wealth, offspring, heaven, immortality)."[3] Theravâda Buddhism in Thailand also has a distinct emphasis on orthopraxy as opposed to orthodoxy and, like Hinduism, has

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[1] Thomas A. Kirsch, "Modernising Implications of Nineteenth Century Reforms of the Thai Sangha", in Bardwell L. Smith (ed), *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*, Anima Books, Chambersburg Penn., 1978, p.53.

[2] Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*, Penguin Books, London, 1975, p.72.

[3] ibid. pp.163-164.

also historically emphasised the theory of *kamma*. This has as in Hinduism led to a corresponding religious concern with "right action" in order to guarantee "right results". For example, Sunthorn Na-Rangsi says,

> It is to the credit of Buddhism that the law of *kamma* has been worked out in great detail until a specific *kamma* can be rationally related to a specific result.[4]

Sources of the orthopractic concern with *kamma* and right action in Thai Buddhism in fact lie in the Buddhist scriptures. Sunthorn cites the *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta* in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* as isolating the following specific actions and their precise *kammic* results,

> The killing of living beings leads to a short life ... the persecution of living beings leads to a sickly life ... Irascibility, anger or hatred leads to an ugly figure or a bad complexion ... Envy leads to powerlessness. Non-envy leads to powerfulness. Miserliness or selfishness leads to poverty or pennilessness.[5]

A second source of Theravāda Buddhism's concern with correct practice or orthopraxy lies in the central place of the immense canonical literature on correct clerical practice, the eight volumes of the *Vinayapiṭaka*, which reflect either the Buddha's or the early Buddhist *saṅgha's* concern with the details of spiritual practice. In the *Vinayapiṭaka* ascetic practices are laid down in minute detail, to the extent that in Buddhism the notion of conformity to the scriptures implies not only correct belief or understanding of the recorded doctrine, as is the case in Christianity, but also the correct practice of the path to salvation whose description occupies such a substantial part of the Theravāda canon.

Practice also has an important place in the religion because according to Buddhist doctrine *nibbāna* or salvation depends on insight which can only be developed through moral and meditative practice. Unlike the Christian notion of salvation which is based upon faith or belief, Buddhist salvation or *nibbāna* can only be attained as the result of an extra-ordinary insight into reality whose achievement depends not upon simply believing in the reality of that salvation but upon sustained mental practice or meditation. Only a mind focused by moral and meditative practice can penetrate to and attain *nibbāna*. In Buddhism spiritual attainment or holiness is not simply manifested in acts of piety but is regarded as being generated and produced by those strictly specified acts. This general equation

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[4]Sunthorn Na-Rangsi, *The Buddhist Concept of Karma and Rebirth*, Mahamakut Rajavidyalay Press, Bangkok, 1976, p.83.

[5]ibid. pp.82-83.

of clerical piety with strict abidance by the monkly code of conduct often blends in the popular animistically influenced religion with magical beliefs in the supernatural efficacy of religious practice **per se**. Terwiel makes the following observations of Central Thai farmers' beliefs,

> Many laymen believe that the monks who behave strictly according to the precepts [i.e. the *vinaya*] are generating more and stronger beneficial power than less strict *bhikkhus* [monks] and such monks should be supported in preference to those who do not make these efforts.[6]

Even though Buddhism possesses a considerable body of canonical and commentarial literature disputes over matters of doctrinal interpretation have not in fact been a historical characteristic of Thai Buddhism or of Theravâda Buddhism in general. Instead, given that salvation depends ultimately upon religious practice rather than belief, and that moral and immoral actions are regarded as having precise and specific consequences, the historical focus of concern has been on correct clerical practice. While not directly hindering the development of an analytical or innovative and questioning approach to matters of doctrine the key teachings of *kamma* and *nibbāna* have led to a relative focus on practice in Theravāda Buddhist history rather than on doctrine or theory. However, the actual interpretation of the goal and character of Buddhist practice by the Buddha himself, as recorded in the *Suttapiṭaka*, can also be seen as having devalued the place of free rational enquiry in the Buddhist tradition and as having inhibited the development of a speculative intellectual tradition.

1.3 The Secondary Place of Reason in Buddhist Thought.

Philosophical activity in the Western intellectual tradition has historically been characterised by the acceptance of the authority of reason (however that reason may be defined) in intellectual and theoretical disputes. There has also been, at least in theory, a general preparedness to accept the conclusions of logical reasoning and argumentation however personally repugnant or unpleasant those conclusions may at times be. Since the Scientific Revolution this reliance upon reason has even come to be characteristic of many schools of religious thought in Christianity in addition to being a fundamental principle of the secular pursuit of knowledge. Buddhism, however, recognises supra-rational forms of knowledge as ultimately being superior to mere reason and as a consequence does not regard rational enquiry as being of ultimate significance. The intellectual activities of conceptual thought or reasoning

[6] Barend Jan Terwiel, *Religion in Rural Central Thailand*, Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, submitted 1971, p.164.

are encompassed within the notions of *vitakka*, "thought conception", and *vicāra*, "discursive thinking". Spiritual insight, on the other hand, is developed through meditation, whose various levels are called *jhānas* or "absorptions". The rational and discursive thought processes of *vitakka* and *vicāra* are traditionally described as characterising only the lower meditative states, and are wholly transcended in the higher states where they give way to supra-rational wisdom or *paññā* which leads to the attainment of *nibbāna*. This *paññā* or insight into the fundamental conditions of reality (i.e. change or *anicca* and non-self or *anattā*), which liberates one from suffering, *dukkha*, is not of a rational character and cannot be arrived at be means of any type of logical analysis. Because it alone cannot lead to *paññā* or saving insight Buddhism does not give reason the pride of place it has traditionally occupied in Western thought, and neither is intellectual speculation valued as highly as in Western philosophy.

Unrestrained rational enquiry is explicitly criticised by the Buddha as being without spiritual "benefit" in the effort to attain salvation from suffering. The following statement by the Buddha against giving consideration to certain philosophical questions posed by some of his followers, here taken from the *Cinta Sutta* in the *Papāta Vagga* of the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, is an often repeated formula found in several places in the *Suttapiṭaka*,

> You should not think of matters such as whether the world is eternal or not eternal, whether the world has an end or does not have an end ... Whether beings after having died yet live again or do not live again ... Why should consideration not be given to such matters? Because such thinking is not beneficial. It is not the beginning [of the practice] of *brahmacariya*[7] which is undertaken for the sake of attaining tiredness [of world involvement], for the easing of lust, for extinction, peace, wisdom, enlightenment, for *nibbāna*.(T)[8]

However, in contrast to this traditional devaluation of uninhibited rational enquiry some Buddhists have in recent decades argued that, unlike the Semitic religions' emphasis on faith, their religion is fundamentally rational and so not in conflict with the methods of modern science or logical thought. For example, one Sri Lankan monk, Bhikkhu Ananda, has claimed that,

> Buddhism does not impose any dogmatic belief upon its adherents. The Buddhist is asked to believe that which he himself has proved to be true.[9]

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[7] *Brahmacariya*, "the pure or holy life", a term denoting the renunciate life of the monk.

[8] *Cinta Sutta, Papāta Vagga, Saṁyutta Nikāya*, Vol.19/verses1726-7/pp.441-2.

[9] (Bhikkhu) Ananda, *Theravāda and Zen*, Gunasena & Co., Colombo Ceylon, 1962, p.30.

Such enthusiastic attempts to associate Buddhism with the assumed intellectual superiority of empiricism or the scientific method are commonly based upon interpretations of the *Kàlàma Sutta*[10], which has been taken by some modernist Buddhists as a Buddhist charter for free enquiry. Bhikkhu Ananda says,

> In the *Kalama Sutta* we are asked not to believe in anything even merely because the Buddha happened to preach it ... The true Buddhist is a free thinker, a seeker of the truth, who seeks to disarm the one enemy - Ignorance. He is self-dependent ... In his quest for supreme wisdom, the Buddhist will be guided by reason and knowledge rather than sentiment and emotion.[11]

Claims such as these are made because in the *Kàlàma Sutta* the Buddha advises the Kālāma people that the assumed authority of report, tradition, hearsay or of a renowned teacher or text should not be accepted uncritically when considering the claims of competing or dubious doctrines. But despite criticising unthinking faith in traditional views and those who put themselves up as authorities the Buddha in this *sutta* is also critical of unrestrained rational investigations of different religious doctrines. He criticises rational activity which does not arrive at the most beneficial or the most ethical result but instead accepts conclusions arrived at by purely logical analysis. In the *Kālāma Sutta* the Buddha also admonishes the Kālāma people to,

> not be led by mere logic ... by inference ... by considering appearances ... by the agreement with a considered and approved theory ... by seeming possibilities.(T)[12]

Rather, the Buddha says that the deciding criterion when weighing up competing views or theories should be whether a certain doctrine is *dosa* (morally corrupt) or *adosa* (free of moral corruption). That is, far from being what some Buddhists, selectively reading the *Kālāma Sutta*, have said is a Buddhist scriptural licence for free intellectual enquiry this *sutta* in fact presents a highly pragmatic approach to rational activity which gives ethical considerations primacy over logical or rational debate. A theory regarded as "valid" by whatever logical criteria would, if not considered to be *adosa* or to promote virtue and moral attainment, and thereby the attainment of *nibbāna*, have to be rejected by the principle presented in the *Kàlàma Sutta*. It is true that the Buddha says the people of Kālāma should in

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[10]The *Kālāma Sutta* is also called the *Kesaputta Sutta* and is found in the *Tikanipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Vol.20/verse 505/pp.179-184.

[11](Bhikkhu) **Ananda**, pp.30-31.

[12]*Kālāma Sutta*, see note (10) above.

their religious enquiries make judgements by the power of their own ethical reason and not depend upon or have uncritical faith in others, in texts or in certain theories. But this is a freedom to realise the **given** truth of Buddhism by one's own ability and not to let a pure reason free to consider whatever might come within its analytical ambit. Buddhists have always been protective of what are presented as their religion's central truths, never opening them up to the same scrutiny which is often directed at competing views. Faith in the central truths of Buddhism, especially faith in *anattā*, is never given up or suspended. For without the doctrine of *anattā* or non-self it would be difficult to distinguish Buddhism from just another of the many Hindu sects and philosophies (which almost without exception emphasise the notion of *ātman* or essential self) which Buddhists have for millenia sought to distance themselves from. As Slater notes, in Buddhism,

> Intellectual activity is never regarded as a means sufficient in itself ... it is always a means to an end, to that Ariyan intuition which is indispensable to *nibbānic* fulfilment.[13]

Buddhism's emphasis on practice over doctrine and its ranking of reason below transcendent forms of wisdom or insight do not, however, mean that the religion is inherently anti-speculative or incapable of producing a living, ongoing tradition of intellectual enquiry and debate. The early centuries of Buddhism saw multiple schisms over issues of doctrine and the production of a large body of interpretative literature which often included novel views and presentations of the original teachings and scriptures. It also does not mean that Buddhist doctrine is devoid of general philosophical interest or of issues about which there is or can be genuine theoretical debate. Indeed the major part of this study will be taken up with a philosophical consideration of the issues raised by Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations, both within the body of his work itself and in the traditionally accepted teachings of Buddhism. Rather, it is the case that Buddhism as a theoretical system has historically been based on a quite different understanding of the place of reason and of doctrinal debate than has been characteristic of Western scholarship. And in turn this different appreciation of the place of reason and reasoning in human knowledge appears to have limited, or at least not to have promoted the development, of an intellectual environment in which rational enquiry is not subject to explicit extra-rational constraints.

The general constraints on reason and doctrinal debate outlined above have,

[13] Robert Lawson Slater, *Paradox and Nibbana*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1951, p.60.

however, been present in Buddhism since its inception and yet as already noted there have still been periods of significant intellectual activity and theoretical innovation in the history of the religion. The high degree of intellectual stagnation traditionally characteristic of Thai Buddhism cannot therefore be attributed solely any presumed inherent anti-intellectual tendency of the religion, although the constraints described above have undoubtedly been important factors discouraging the development of a critical approach to doctrine in Thailand and other Theravâda countries. It is necessary to turn to a more concrete consideration of the place of Buddhism in Thai society to understand the long uninnovative centuries of religious and doctrinal conservatism in Thailand. For as an integral part of the Thai social order Buddhism is subject to extra-religious influences which have historically restricted intellectual speculation on matters of doctrine. This consideration will at the same time detail the politico-religious backdrop against which Buddhadâsa has worked and to which he in general opposes himself.

1.4 Buddhism as State Ideology in Thailand.

In addition to its spiritual message of salvation Theravâda Buddhism has since its official adoption by the Thai kings over seven hundred years ago had a distinctly this-worldly influence. Buddhist principles and ideas inform Thai notions of government, politics and social interaction, and the religion's ostensibly spiritual teachings have long been used as justifications for various courses of action in political matters. The social and political implementation of Buddhist teachings and the governance of society by a Buddhist monarch are positively sanctioned by the canonical literature. The *Agañña Sutta*[14] recounts that because of greed and confusion amongst themselves the first humans gathered together and argued for the need to select the best among them to, "be wrathful when indignation is right ... censure that which should be censured and banish he who deserves to be banished."[15] Tambiah describes this *sutta* as presenting an elective and contractual theory of kingship whereby a king is elected by a people and remunerated by the payment of a rice tax[16].

The concept of a Buddhist monarch is further developed and reinforced by the notion of the *cakkavattin*, a morally inspired keeper of the social order who in the

[14] *Agañña Sutta, Dîgha Nikâya*, Vol.11/verses51-72/pp.61-75.

[15] Cited by S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976, p.13.

[16] ibid.

Mahāparinibbāna Sutta is included in a list of four types of people described as *thūpāraha*[17], or as worthy of having a pilgrimage monument or stupa erected over their ashes. The other three types of *thūpāraha* or "stupa-deserving" individuals all have a spiritual rather than a worldly character, i.e. (1) a *tathāgata*, (2) a follower of a *tathāgata*, and (3) a *paccekabuddha*[18]. Further, in the *Cakkavatti Sutta*[19] the Buddha instructs the emperor Dalhanemi in the *cakkavattivatta*, the vow of the universal monarch or *cakkavattin*, to depend on and honour the *dhamma*, to protect the *dhamma* in himself and his people, to provide property and subsistence to those in need and to follow the counsel of those knowledgeable in the *dhamma*.

But while sections of the canonical Theravāda Buddhist scriptures explicitly detail principles of moral governance it was not until almost two hundred years after the Buddha's death that the Buddhist *saṅgha* first became formally associated with a temporal regime. It was under As'oka, ruler of an extensive North Indian empire from 272 to 232 B.C., that the *saṅgha* and Buddhism first acquired the role of an institutional religion, both gaining the protection and support of a temporal monarch and becoming dependent upon and subordinate to that monarch. Somboon Suksamran isolates several reasons for the sponsorship of Buddhism by various Asian monarchs as a state religion. In addition to specific teachings in the *Agañña* and *Mahāparinibbāna Suttas* and in other sections of the canon, such as the *Jātakas*, about the necessity of obedience to a righteous king, the general outlook of Buddhism also provided a basis for moral and legal-political order, being,

> a perspective within which each human existence could be seen as the consequential outworking of moral gain and loss in previous existences.[20]

Somboon also points out that in the Buddhist ethical system equanimity, peaceableness and generosity are rated high while anger, conflict, violence and self-centred desire for gain are strongly disapproved of. That is, Buddhist ethics does not in general sanction activities which undermine social order and stability. And finally, the Buddhist ethico-religious system was maintained by an organisation of strictly non-political voluntary teachers effectively supported by the alms and donations of the faithful. In other words, while providing a religious justification for

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[17] *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol.10/verse135/p.116.

[18] *Paccekabuddha* - a person who attains enlightenment but who unlike the Buddha or *sammāsambuddha* does not teach a message of salvation to the world.

[19] *Cakkavatti Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol.11/verses33-50/pp.43-60.

[20] Somboon Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, C. Hurst & Co., London, 1977, p.xi.

the institution of kingship and promoting values conducive to law and order, and thereby promoting the stability of the institution of the monarchy, the *saṅgha* required little direct support from the royal treasury and provided no direct political threat.

It was As'oka who established the precedent whereby a Buddhist monarch was also charged with the authority to ensure that monks obeyed the *vinaya* or clerical code of conduct. The Buddhist king had no authority regarding doctrine or *dhamma*, only over the *saṅgha's* "purity", a term which traditionally connotes strict abidance by the *vinaya*. This definition of the monarch's authority in matters of clerical practice but not of doctrine again reveals the strongly orthopractic character of Theravâda Buddhism, for the prime concern of both Buddhist monarchs and laity has historically been with the *saṅgha's* strict purity in matters of monkly practice. The purity or strictness of practice maintained by members of the *saṅgha* is the most commonly used measure of the overall "health" or status of the *sàsana* or religion. And seeing as the propagation of the doctrine of salvation or the *dhamma* was the sole responsibility of the *saṅgha*, and that the monkhood's spiritual status and authority were regarded as depending on strict obedience to the *vinaya*, the monarch's control over clerical practice came to be considered crucial to the maintenance of the *dhamma* itself, as a doctrine of liberation founded on the living practice of righteousness among the monks.

Following As'oka later Buddhist monarchs also acquired an institutionally sanctioned religious power that depended upon their control of temporal power, for only a strong temporal monarch could hope to muster sufficient sway to enforce strict purity in the *saṅgha* throughout his kingdom. Strong temporal power centralised in a monarch has traditionally been regarded as essential to the well-being of the *sàsana*. This As'okan model provided the pattern for church-state relations in the first Thai kingdom of Sukhothai, and the association of the Buddhist *saṅgha* with the Thai state has been significant since that time. As Mulder notes,

> Throughout history Thai governments have been aware of the important integrative function of institutionalised Buddhism and repeated efforts have been made to control the monks and their practices, and to bring their organisation under the supervision of the state.[21]

Somboon Suksamran concurs, stating that Buddhism,

> has long served as one of the most important sources of political

[21]Niels Mulder, *Everyday Life in Thailand*, Duang Kamol Publishers, Bangkok, 1979, p.140.

> legitimation for the political rulers; one of the main socialising, acculturating and unifying forces in Thai society.[22]

At the same time the order of monks has been rendered politically impotent because its integration into the political structure was effected in such a way that it had no means to exercise political influence. As Morell and Samudavanija observe,

> The Buddhist hierarchy, by virtue of their numbers and the respect accorded them by the rest of society, represent a potentially powerful political force. But because the Thai branch of Theravāda Buddhism is more pacifist, contemplative and apolitical than the Mahāyāna branch found in Vietnam - or even other Theravāda branches - monks did not intervene in politics.[23]

The drawing of a sharply defined distinction between a mundane religious path for the world-involved laity, *lokiyadhamma*, and a supramundane path for renunciates, *lokuttaradhamma*, and the consequent radical separation of the role of the layperson from that of the monk have provided a religious justification for proscribing clerical involvement in politics. For when world-involvement is equated with spiritual pollution no monk can become directly involved in politics without irreparably damaging his clerical authority. In contrast to this traditional segregation of the lay or mundane from the clerical or supramundane Buddhadāsa has been concerned to abolish the distinction between the *lokiya* and *lokuttara* realms. This doctrinal stance amounts to a denial of the traditionally accepted apolitical character of the role of the Buddhist clergy and has drawn severe criticism from religious and political conservatives in Thailand.

Thai Buddhism's institutional isolation from explicit political involvement has not only resulted from the theoretical influence of a particular doctrine but has long been enforced by direct control and supervision of clerical affairs by the Thai state. The recent history of church-state relations in Thailand amounts to a series of actions by the monarchy, and since the 1932 revolution the military dominated state, to utilise the *saṅgha's* authority to promote the policies and security of the government of the day while at the same time depriving the monkhood of any ability to interfere in the running of the state. One of the first acts of King Rama I (1782-1801), founder of the present Chakri dynasty of Bangkok after the devastation of the earlier Thai kingdom of Ayutthia by Burmese forces, was to re-organise and re-vivify Buddhism. Political acumen as well as Buddhist piety can be

[22]Somboon **Suksamran**, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1982, p.40.

[23]David **Morell** & Chai-anan **Samudavanija**, *Political Conflict in Thailand*, Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain Publishers, Cambridge Mass., 1981, p.57.

read into the following account by a Thai prince of the activities of Rama I in trying to rebuild social order after the strife and chaos following the downfall of Ayutthia in 1767,

> It is natural that the King's systematic mind would have promoted first a code of morality by which a standardisation of the conduct of the clergy could be established. He then set out with energy to see that his lay subjects as well as members of monastic orders behaved as good Buddhists. His effort in this direction is evidenced by the innumerable decrees governing the conduct of monks and laity.[24]

The twentieth century has seen two major shifts in the character of the Thai state's use of the Buddhist *saṅgha* as an ideological basis of its temporal authority. The first shift was effected in the early decades of this century by the absolute monarch King Wachirawut or Rama VI (1910-1921) who emphasised that Buddhism not only underpinned the monarchy but also the prosperity of the entire nation. By stressing the importance of Buddhism to the nation, not just to the monarchy, Rama VI laid the groundwork for the religion to become the ideological foundation of the democratic Thai state which came into being with the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932. That is, when effective power shifted from the monarch to politicians, and subsequently to the military, the ideological role of Buddhism also shifted, or rather expanded. Institutional Buddhism then became the ideological bulwark of the modern Thai state just as it had previously been, and in fact continues to be, the bulwark of the institution of the monarchy. Thai political leaders since 1932 have placed just as much importance on maintaining and controlling the Buddhist *saṅgha* as did earlier absolute monarchs. There is therefore a significant degree of continuity between the traditional Thai monarchy and the modern military state in terms of the use of Buddhist symbolism in the public legitimation of power. Rama VI's royalist-cum-nationalist slogan of Chāt - Sāsanā - Phramahākasat (ชาติ – ศาสนา – พระมหากษัตริย์ "Nation-Religion-Monarch"), a derivative of the old jingoistic British maxim of "God, King and Country", has been touted as much by recent military rulers as it was by former absolute monarchs in their efforts to promote national unity and shore up their own regimes.

Since the 1932 revolution the *saṅgha* has been under the direct control of the government, through the Department of Religious Affairs, rather than under the control of the now mostly symbolic monarch. Tambiah aptly summarises the present politically dependent status of the *saṅgha* relative to the Thai state,

[24] (H.H. Prince) Dhani Nivat Kromamun Bidyalabh, *A History of Buddhism in Siam*, Siam Society, Bangkok, 1965, p.23.

> The Department of Religious Affairs[25] spends more money on the stipends of ecclesiastical functionaries, on their fans[26], and on the staging of religious festivals than it spends on monks' education. The ministers and generals and colonels engage in highly visible merit-making activities; in turn, high ranking ecclesiastics solicit their presence and patronage when they initiate activities for the material benefit of their own monasteries.[27]

Of importance here is the financial and practical emphasis on the visibility of the state's patronage of the *saṅgha*, which indicates that more than the Thai power elite's piety is being demonstrated in publicly supported Buddhist activities. State supported Buddhist rituals are also an attempt to legitimise the state's political power by promoting association with the traditional institutional symbols of legitimacy.

A second shift in the character of *saṅgha*-state relations has occurred since World War II, in particular since the regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1957-1964), when the predominating concern of government became the promotion of national development. In political terms the concern with development firstly translated into an emphasis on national unity and the integration of peripheral or marginal groups (e.g. Hill Tribes) into the main body of Thai society, and secondly into a concerted campaign to counter communism which was interpreted as causing social divisions and so obstructing the goal of national development. The following comment by Wit aptly summarises the nexus of concerns which has dominated recent Thai political history,

> Contemporary Thailand's ability to avoid the tragedy of Vietnam [i.e. communist domination] is largely dependent upon its government's degree of success in resolving vital national problems and promoting national development.[28]

In 1962 Sarit passed a new *Saṅgha* Act which effectively centralised power in the hands of those monks associated with or supported by his regime. Somboon Suksamran catches the political tenor of the changes when he notes the major directives to the restructured *saṅgha* administration were,

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[25]The Department of Religious Affairs, within the Thai Ministry of Education, is the latter day equivalent of the As'okan-styled monarch entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the "purity" of the *saṅgha*. This department implements political decisions affecting the *saṅgha* and among other things disburses clerical stipends, supervises the running of the systematised clerical examinations and the allotting of clerical titles and honours.

[26]Ceremonial fans are used to indicate the relative status of monks in the *saṅgha* hierarchy.

[27]**Tambiah**, *World Conqueror World Renouncer*, p.397.

[28]Daniel **Wit**, *Thailand - Another Vietnam?*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1968, p.20.

> First, to follow the policies of the government; second, to oversee and prevent the communist infiltration of the *saṅgha* and monasteries; third, to prevent any attempt to use the monasteries for the propagation of communism.[29]

In the context of the Cold War and the civil wars in neighbouring Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea, and in order to mobilise popular sentiment, successive Thai military regimes and military leaders have maintained that communism seeks the destruction of all religion, including Buddhism. And because Buddhism has since the foundation of the first Thai kingdom been argued to be the foundation of both the nation and the monarchy communism has consequently been attacked as a threat to the foundations of Thailand's national integrity and to its most hallowed institutions. Buddhism has been officially defined in Thailand as anti-communist and communism as anti-Buddhist. As the intellectual Puey Ungphakorn observed in 1969,

> According to a government slogan, broadcast on the radio, a person without religion must be a communist or a terrorist. Some school teachers also repeat this theory to their pupils.[30]

The continuing ideological significance of institutional Buddhism to Thailand's political and military leaders is demonstrated by the fact that each major change in government policy this century has been accompanied by efforts to reform and re-organise the monkhood and to redefine its function in Thai society. Somboon Suksamran observes that throughout all the changes, "The Thai *saṅgha* has been loyal and subservient to the political authority in return for protection and patronage."[31]

In this context where Buddhism fulfils an important politico-ideological role the Thai state exerts considerable control over both the organisation and education of *saṅgha* members. The maintenance of certain traditional interpretations of doctrine is seen by most of those in positions of influence and political authority in Thailand as part and parcel of preserving Buddhism as the ideological foundation of the nation and, as a consequence, the intellectual atmosphere within the *saṅgha* is highly restricted and not conducive to free intellectual enquiry or debate. While the strong emphasis on practice rather than doctrine and the relative devaluation of free intellectual enquiry in the Buddhist tradition have historically contributed to the

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[29] **Suksamran**, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, p.40.

[30] **Puey Ungphakorn**, "The Role of Ethics and Religion in National Development", in *Visakha Puja*, Buddhist Association of Thailand, Bangkok, 2517 (1974), p.116.

[31] **Suksamran**, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, p.13.

intellectual conservatism and stagnation of Thai Buddhism the most concrete determinant of this situation has undoubtedly been the power and control of the Thai state over *saṅgha* affairs. In recent centuries, and especially in this century, institutional Buddhism in Thailand has had no independent existence apart from the Thai state, which both supports and controls it. Maintenance of the traditional religious symbols and legitimation of the existing temporal order rather than doctrinal innovation or investigative scholarship have therefore been the predominating concerns of most monks.

The control exerted by the state over the *saṅgha*, both directly in anti-communist laws and indirectly through the conferring of honours on favoured monks, and the community of interests between senior *saṅgha* officials and the Thai monarchy and political elite, together result in strong pressures to maintain a traditional view of the religion and its teachings and of the role of the *saṅgha* in society. This is because the traditional character of Buddhist teachings, especially on social matters, provide justifications for the existing social order in which the senior clergy and political leaders share in a symbiosis of power.

But despite this politically controlled atmosphere within the *saṅgha*, which is consequently resistant to and unsupportive of innovation or reform in most aspects of the religion, it is still the case that, because of the overriding orthopractic concern of the *saṅgha* hierarchy to maintain strict, centralised control over correct clerical practice, there is in fact no centrally enforced control on interpretations of doctrine. There is, for example, no central censorial body in the *saṅgha* which vets Buddhist publications in Thailand. Any monk or layperson is free to publish whatever interpretation of the scriptures and doctrines he or she wishes without first needing to obtain any ecclesiastical imprimatur. Because faithfulness to Buddhist tradition is in the main defined in terms of strict abidance to traditional practices rather than in terms of adherence to a given orthodoxy no specific institutional constraints exist on Buddhist writings or discussion. The only enforced intellectual or theoretical control in Thailand is the general censorship of what the political authorities regard as politically inflammatory, communist, libellous or immoral literature. While Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations of doctrine have been severely criticised by many religiously and politically conservative individuals, both monks and laypeople, he has never been criticised by the formal institution of the *saṅgha* hierarchy. This is because, given that his work is neither illegal nor subject to secular censorship or restrictions and that he abides by the clerical practices guarded and enforced by the *saṅgha* hierarchy, there are no institutional means or processes that can be used to criticise Buddhadāsa.

There are no formal or institutional barriers to doctrinal reform or theoretical innovation in Thai Buddhism. However, the combined power of the Thai state and senior *saṅgha* hierarchy, whose interests co-incide in seeking to maintain the dominance of doctrinally conservative views and who together control both clerical education and lay religious education in Thailand, has resulted in the actual historical conservatism of Thai Buddhism.

Buddhadāsa'sa doctrinal innovativeness thus breaks with the long conservative tradition in Thai Buddhism which even today remains the dominating influence on the contemporary practice and understanding of the religion. In seeking to appreciate the significance and import of Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations in the context of the historical and present character of Buddhism in Thailand it is therefore necessary to consider how and why he has made this theoretical break. When by far the majority of monks in Thailand continue to either support or acquiesce in the conservative religious and political **status quo** what has motivated Buddhadāsa to set himself at odds with the generally accepted order of things? This issue is the focus of the discussion and analysis in the next chapter, in which some important theoretical and social aspects of Buddhadāsa's work are also outlined and previewed.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOURCES OF BUDDHADASA'S THEORETICAL INNOVATIVENESS.

Until recent decades the Thai Buddhist tradition has been distinctly non-analytical, being almost devoid of debates on doctrinal and theoretical issues and so lacking "theologians" in the Western sense of the term. In contrast to this conservative history where the predominating concern has been to re-affirm and faithfully reproduce the teachings and practices of previous generations Buddhadāsa's work represents the development of a distinctly analytical and philosophical trend. For example, Buddhadāsa has taken the all but unprecedented step of criticising the traditionally accepted interpretation of such central Buddhist teachings as the theory of causation or *paṭiccasamuppāda* and he has questioned the reality of such generally assumed facts as rebirth. Underpinning these re-interpretations is a novel method of approaching the Theravāda scriptures, a method whose objective is the demythologisation of Buddhist doctrine. Buddhadāsa's work is characterised by the systematic reduction of metaphysical aspects of Buddhist teaching, such as notions of rebirth in heaven or hell, to psychological conditions.

This systematic demythologisation of Buddhist doctrine is paralleled by Buddhadāsa's pervasive concern to give religious value to action in the material world. His re-interpretations of the religion's teachings are characterised by a marked shift of the theoretical focus of Buddhist doctrine from the transcendent to this world here and now. Buddhadāsa effects this shift by redefining notions of Buddhist salvation as being conditions of life in this world, and then using these redefinitions to develop a more explicitly social thrust to Buddhist doctrine. He reverses the relation between desire and the material world which has traditionally characterised most Buddhist teachings. Traditionally Buddhism has taught that in the face of the transience of the things of the world, *anicca*, human beings should cultivate detachment and strive for the transcendent salvation of *nibbāna*. However, Buddhadāsa proposes that suffering is not always solely attributeable to an individual's *kammic* inheritance, caused by his or her ignorant cravings for passing things, but on the contrary is often caused by extra-individual factors in the

external world. Whereas Buddhism has traditionally taught that an individual's *dukkha* or suffering is a wholly self-caused condition which is relieved through individual spiritual practice Buddhadāsa maintains that the suffering caused by socio-economic exploitation and political oppression has an external source and can be ended only by spiritually guided action in the social world. That is, for Buddhadāsa liberation from suffering involves not only overcoming one's own ignorance and craving through spiritual insight, the traditional Buddhist notion of salvation, but also overcoming oppressive or *dukkha*-causing conditions in the external world. The focus of action to attain the religious goal of ending suffering is therefore expanded to include not only the self-directed moral and meditative practices of the individual who suffers but also welfare-directed activity in the social and material context in which he or she suffers. In brief, for Buddhadāsa the material world has become an integral component of the proper religious goal of human aspirations.

Buddhadāsa's systematic reworking of Theravāda teachings is informed by an awareness, for the most part implicit but nonetheless generally characteristic of his work, that Buddhist salvation can no longer be defined in terms of a retreat from the social world. The inclusion of the social world and social action within Buddhadāsa's interpretation of the notion of salvation or *nibbāna* can be seen as his recognition of the potential benefits afforded humanity by modern technology and contemporary scientific knowledge. Buddhadāsa accepts the results of science and tries to bring scientific knowledge within the scope of his re-interpreted version of Buddhism. He does this firstly by claiming that his view of Buddhism is in accord with the findings of science, and secondly by criticising the animist and Brahmanical aspects of Thai Buddhism as being inconsistent with his scientific and rationalist interpretation of the scriptures.

In the traditional structure of Buddhist teaching and practice in which there is a sharp distinction between the mundane and supramundane realms world-involvement has been associated with the lay form of the religion, which has incorporated animist and Brahmanical features. Buddhadāsa, however, wishes to integrate a positive valuation of action in the material world with strict doctrinal Buddhism, i.e. with what has traditionally been regarded as the *lokuttara* or supramundane world-detached form of the religion appropriate only for monks. He rejects the traditional lay or *lokiya* form of Buddhism not only because of the inconsistencies of its animist and Brahmanical features with his rational, scientific outlook but also because he transfers the traditional world-involved or *lokiya* role to the doctrinal or *lokuttara* level. Buddhadāsa wishes to integrate the *lokuttara* concern with salvation with the *lokiya* emphasis on world-involvement.

Buddhadāsa is a strong supporter of the modernist intellectual environment in Thailand and he finds his most receptive audience among the Westernised and Western-educated Thai intellectual elite. Buddhadāsa's intellectual modernism, a result of the influence of Western scientific and rationalist forms of knowledge on his thought, is further demonstrated by his greater emphasis on the authority of reason and rational argument in the interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures over the authority traditionally accorded to specific texts and reverred commentators. Buddhadāsa's rationalism takes the form of a systematic doctrinalism, where he takes fundamental principles of the religion, such as *anattā* and *nibbāna*, and proceeds to develop re-interpretations of doctrine by logically developing relations between such concepts rather than by slavishly mouthing the conclusions of some commentary or traditionally accepted authority.

Because of the importance of the social world to his interpretation of Buddhist doctrine Buddhadāsa has also broken the traditional silence of Thai monks on political matters to express explicit opinions on politics and social change in his country. But while his work has political significance Buddhadāsa cannot be categorised as being aligned with any existing political group or faction whether of the "right" or the "left". While offering Buddhist-based arguments providing qualified support for socio-economic development and criticising capitalist exploitation and oppression of the poor he is at the same time critical of Marxism and all materialist philosophies, including what he regards as the sensualism of unfettered consumerism. He is thus critical of both the political East and West.

However, Buddhadāsa's radical re-interpretative efforts are not without their difficulties. His arguments are often vague and the sources of certain interpretations are left uncited and at times are even hidden. But over and above these academic details important aspects of his thought, especially his social philosophy, are flawed by fundamental contradictions. These theoretical contradictions are in fact forced on Buddhadāsa as a result of some of the practical contradictions of his decision to attempt to radically reform Buddhist teachings and practice while yet officially remaining within the conservative and orthopractic Thai *saṅgha*. But even given these difficulties Buddhadāsa's work remains important, as the starting point and catalyst of a growing critical modernist movement within Thai Buddhism which marks a real efflorescence of Buddhist intellectual activity.

But given the unquestioning acceptance of doctrine which has historically characterised Thai Buddhism, in analysing the total phenomenon of Buddhadāsa's work it is necessary to understand the sources of his theoretical and philosophical innovativeness. In the previous chapter some explanations were offered for Thai

Buddhism's long conservative history. In this chapter in addition to further detailing the theoretical and social context of Buddhadâsa's work I will also investigate the origins of his innovativeness. I will seek to detail what it is that has changed in the traditional mix of Buddhism's internal theoretical constraints and external political limitations which has permitted Buddhadâsa to develop his radical views. The theoretical changes represented by Buddhadâsa's work, his theoretical this-worldliness and attitudes to discursive authority in Buddhism, touched on above, are analysed in detail in the following chapters. Here the changes in the cultural, social and political context which have impinged on the religion in the last century will be discussed, for Buddhadâsa's work is far from being an undetermined or random irruption of reason and criticism in an otherwise stagnant tradition. His work has developed within and been influenced by significant external changes in Thai society and by Buddhists' perceptions of themselves and their place in the world. Firstly, the precedents for Buddhadâsa's review of doctrine will be considered by reviewing the character of historical reform movements in Buddhism. Secondly, the influence on Buddhadâsa of King Mongkut's nineteenth century royal-sponsored reform of the Thai *saṅgha* will be discussed. Thirdly, and most importantly, the impact of Western forms of knowledge and scholarship and of socio-economic development on the theoretical and social context of Thai Buddhism will be analysed and their influence on Buddhadâsa's own views presented.

2.1 Precedents for Buddhadâsa's Doctrinal Re-interpretations.

2.1.1 The History of Buddhist Reform Movements.

Historical precedents exist in Theravâda Buddhism for Buddhadâsa's doctrinal re-interpretations, which he regards not as total innovations but as being reforms based on fundamental religious principles. Buddhadâsa has seen his goal as being to, "revive the practice of *dhamma* so that it is correct, as at the beginning [of Buddhism] or directly according to what is true."(T)[1] Religious reform in many traditions, not only Buddhism, is often characterised by innovation and change founded upon continuity with the past. Such a pattern of innovation based upon stated conservatism or faithfulness to the past is necessary for any reformer working within a tradition where authority is invested in certain source teachings, scriptures or recorded insights. Reform is then couched in terms of a return to the purity of

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[1] Cited by Chit Phibănthăĕn (ชิต ภิบาลแทน), *Chīwit Lae Ngăn Khŏrng Phutthathăt Phikkhu* ("ชีวิตและงานของพุทธทาส" *The Life and Work of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu*), Silapăbanăkăn (ศิลปาบรรณาการ), Bangkok, 2520 (1977), p.42.

the tradition's original sources, which Buddhadâsa takes to be the teaching of salvation as passed down in the Buddha's own recorded words in the Theravâda canon. In Buddhadâsa's work both the moments of conservatism and continuity and of radicalism and change are equally pronounced and for each innovative adjustment he makes in re-interpreting Buddhism he takes an equally pronounced step back to what he regards as the pure and original form of the religion.

It is possible to interpret Buddhadâsa's enterprise as another instance of Buddhism's long history of fundamentalist tendencies and movements which have aimed to re-attain what is assumed to be the original purity of Buddhist teaching and practice. Rahula notes that in ancient Ceylon the As'okan accord between *saṅgha* and state was seen by many monks as having deleterious effects on the *sâsana* and was viewed,

> with great anxiety and concern, as a mark of deterioration ... they felt that inspite of their earnest and repeated attempts to "purify" the *sâsana* they were helpless against the overwhelming tide of change and development. Disappointed in the contemporary state of affairs, therefore, they looked back for their guidance and consolation upon the past which they regarded as perfect and ideal.[2]

Even in the time of the Buddha and immediately after his death there was a tendency to refer to the then recent past as representing a time of goodness and purity in comparison to what was seen as contemporary corruption and moral decay. Rahula notes the following discussion in the *Suttapiṭaka* between the Buddha and one of his closest disciples, Mahâkassapa,

> Mahâkassapa asked the Buddha why formerly there were less precepts and more *arahants*, and why now there were more precepts and fewer *arahants*.
> "It is so Kassapa", said the Buddha, "when people become degenerate and the good teaching disappears, there are more precepts and fewer *bhikkhus* attain *arahantship*."[3]

The notion of moral decay and corruption of teachings has thus been associated with Buddhist reform movements from the earliest times.

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[2]Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Gunasena & Co. Ltd, Colombo Ceylon, 1966, p.199.

[3]ibid. pp.202-203.

2.1.2 The Influence of King Mongkut's Reforms on Buddhadāsa.

Buddhadāsa's doctrinal innovations also have a more recent historical precedent in the reforms instituted in the last century by King Mongkut, Rama IV. Mongkut sought to uproot inconsistencies between monastic practices and the clerical code of conduct or *vinaya*, and between a strictly doctrinal view of Buddhism and popular views, which he and subsequent reformers of Thai Buddhism have regarded as Brahmanical or animistic accretions to the pure religion. When Rama I restructured and reformed the Thai *saṅgha* in the first years of the present Chakri dynasty he referred to the established traditions of the earlier Thai kingdom of Ayutthia as his model. Mongkut, however, went back even further into history to find a pristine source for his reforms in the actual Pali scriptures, and as Butt notes,

> Because the ideas he derived from these sources sometimes clashed with practices and beliefs which over the years had come to be accepted as orthodox by most Thai, Mongkut was frequently accused of supporting radically innovative changes in Buddhist faith and life.[4]

As already discussed popular Thai religion is a combination of many influences, animistic and Brahmanical beliefs blending with more strictly Buddhist doctrines. However, the existence of non-Buddhist spirit worship, magical rites and the honouring of Hindu deities has not traditionally been seen as conflicting with the canonical message of the religion. Rather, such features have been regarded as part of the overall heritage of Thai Buddhism. But Mongkut rejected many of these animist and Brahmanical "accretions" to the canonical or doctrinal message of Buddhism, arguing that animism and the worship of various gods are **inconsistent** with the doctrines expressed in the Buddhist scriptures and urging a closer observance and understanding of those scriptures. Mongkut's studies of the Pali canon during the thirty odd years he spent as a monk before he disrobed and ascended the Thai throne led him to see discrepancies between the scriptures and the actual practices of Thai monks. As Kirsch notes,

> He was so anguished about this discrepancy he vowed that he would disrobe if he did not receive some sign that the monastic line of succession back to the Buddha had not been broken in Thailand.[5]

Mongkut subsequently met a Mon monk whom he came to regard as being of a tradition which continued the original Theravāda tradition and proceeded to

[4] John W. **Butt**, "Thai Kingship and Religious Reform", in Bardwell L. Smith (ed), *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*, Anima Books, Chambersburg Penn., 1978, p.47.

[5] **Kirsch**, "Modernising Implications of Nineteenth Century Reforms in the Thai Sangha", p.58.

establish at Wat Boworniwet in Bangkok a new, stricter sect of monks, the Thammayut, - "those adhering to the doctrine or *dhamma*" - in accord with the more scriptural aspects of the Mon Burmese tradition. The Thammayut Sect remains today as the second institutionally recognised sect of the Thai *saṅgha*, the other being the Mahânikây Sect (literally, "the great sect"), which Mongkut characterised as "those adhering to long-standing habit" and to which the overwhelming majority of Thai monks, including Buddhadâsa, still remain attached. But as Wells observes, despite institutional recognition the reformist efforts underpinning Mongkut's establishment of the Thammayut Sect ran,

> counter to popular religious concepts and observances, but he [King Mongkut] saved Buddhism for the well-educated and humanistic among the Thai who wanted a religion free from superstition and in accord with ethical and scientific thought generally prevailing at that time. King Mongkut's approach to Buddhism was both rationalistic and puritanical.[6]

Buddhadâsa's re-interpretations closely parallel aspects of King Mongkut's reforms. Mongkut had an intimate knowledge of then current Western ideas and scientific views, obtained from discussions with Christian missionaries dating from his early days as a monk in the 1830's, and Kirsch comments that Mongkut's emphasis on re-instituting monkly conduct in strict accordance with the *vinaya* went hand in hand with certain ideological commitments,

> For one thing, Mongkut rejected a great many traditional beliefs and practices as superstitious interpolations into Buddhism. He rejected the cosmogony and cosmology represented in the *Traiphum*[7], arguing that cosmology had to accord with the scientific views that he had learned in his contact with Westerners... Mongkut's monastic reform involved then, not only an effort to upgrade monastic practice and to make it more orthodox, but also included an attempt, in Western terms, to demythologise the world.[8]

As will be discussed further in subsequent chapters, in his re-interpretations Buddhadâsa also follows the principle instituted by Mongkut of following the Pali scriptures as closely as possible while attempting to avoid any interpretations of doctrine that contradict contemporary scientific knowledge or rationalistic views.

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[6]Kenneth E. Wells, *Thai Buddhism, Its Rites and Activities*, Suriyabun Publishers, Bangkok, 1975, p.13.

[7]The *Traibhūmikathā* or in Thai the *Trai-phūm Phra Rūang* was composed in the fourteenth century by Lȳ-Thai (also called Phra Yali Thai), a king of the early Thai kingdom of Sukhothai. The *Trai-phūm* has been one of the most important Buddhist texts in Thai history, its elaborate cosmological descriptions being taken as the official account of the various levels of Buddhist hells and heavens attained to as a result of individuals' different qualitative and quantitative accumulations of merit and demerit. The *Traibhūmikathā* was the central Buddhist commentarial text in old Siam because it was regarded as relating the empirical character of Thai society to ultimate Buddhist reality.

[8]Kirsch, "Modernising Implications of Nineteenth Century Reforms in the Thai Sangha", p.59.

There are therefore precedents for Buddhadâsa's work both in the ancient and recent history of Buddhist reform movements. However, the existence of precedents does not by itself explain the character or extent of Buddhadâsa's own innovations, serving more to provide justifications for his novel views once they are presented rather than being the actual provenance of those views. Given the contrast between the novelty of Buddhadâsa's views and the long history of institutionalised conservatism of the tradition within which he works it would appear necessary for there to have been determining or at least triggering influences upon Buddhadâsa's thought from outside of Theravâda Buddhism itself. That is, I suggest that the sources of Buddhadâsa's innovativeness as well as of his specific doctrinal innovations are more likely to be found outside of Buddhism than within it. Specifically I suggest that the origins of the Buddhadâsa's re-appraisal of Buddhism can be traced to the impact of Western cultural, economic and intellectual influence in Asia.

2.2 Western Influences on the Study of Buddhism.

The earliest Western intellectual engagements with Buddhism were the critical denunciations of the early Christian missionaries. However, the denigration of Buddhism and of Asian civilisation as a whole by Europeans in the period of colonialism was much more than a purely religiously instigated phenomenon. In the face of the political, economic and assumed cultural superiority of European civilisation all cultural and intellectual achievements tended to be judged against the norm of Europe and North America, in comparison with which Asian cultures were almost without exception found to be severely lacking. This imputed backwardness of Asia was not only the view of Europeans but was also implicitly accepted by many of those Asians educated under European education systems. However, this resigned acceptance of Asia's intellectual and cultural inferiority began increasingly to be questioned by the nationalist and anti-colonialist movements which were established in the first decades of this century. For the members of these Asian nationalist movements a renewed emphasis and appreciation of indigenous language, religion and culture went hand in hand with political attacks on the colonial powers. The twentieth century has consequently seen a resurgent interest among Asian Buddhists in the teachings and practice of Buddhism. Even though Thailand was never colonised by any European power Thai culture, education and national development have nevertheless been heavily influenced by Europe, and more recently by America and Japan. As a result there are many parallels between the situation in Thailand and the actually colonised countries of Southeast Asia. As among

Buddhists in Ceylon and Burma there has been a resurgent interest in Buddhism among those Thai Buddhists who are concerned to promote the value and significance of Buddhist thought and Buddhist culture in opposition to the implicit and explicit denigration suffered in earlier periods.

Ironically, however, this resurgent national interest in Buddhism has in many ways been spurred by the scholarly activities and intellectual ideals of the colonising Europeans whom Thai, Burmese and Ceylonese Buddhists have otherwise wished to distance themselves from and oppose themselves to. Until Europeans began studying Buddhism seriously in the middle of the nineteenth century doctrinal or scholarly Buddhism, that is the study of the core scriptures of the Buddhist canon, had fallen into decline in all the Theravâda countries, not only in Thailand. Eugene Burnouf was perhaps the first European to appreciate the significance of the hitherto overlooked Pali scriptures. Because of the established British colonial domination of Ceylon that country provided the most accessible source of these canonical scriptures and it was Ceylonese monks who first offered important source information on the Pali *Tipiṭaka* to Europeans. Indeed with the Pali researches undertaken by Thomas Williams Rhys Davids and Herman Oldenburg, and with the establishment of the Pali Text Society in the late nineteenth century, Ceylon became the focus for the revivified scholarly study of Theravâda Buddhist doctrine. The patterns and character of that study have subsequently had a profound influence on Pali studies in all the Theravâda countries, including Thailand.

The early European study of Theravâda Buddhism had a pronounced doctrinal emphasis, producing interpretations which attempted to be in strict logical accord with the principles of the religion. This in turn led to a rejection of popular folk Buddhism in Ceylon as an irrational demonological accretion. As Heinz Bechert notes,

> To be sure, the Indologists could not overlook the fact that monastic practice did not correspond to the precepts of the *vinaya*, that is of canon law, and that the cult of the gods and the exorcism of demons had an important place in the religion of the Sinhalese ... And yet representatives of this approach tried rather precipitously to explain away such observations or simply ignored them. Whatever could not be derived from Buddhist tradition was an "adulteration" of the religion, a Hindu influence or simply popular superstition.[9]

It was this sanitised doctrinal interpretation of Buddhism which was then taken up by the English educated Sinhalese elite as a symbol of their cultural and

[9] Heinz Bechert, "Contradictions in Sinhalese Buddhism", in Bardwell L. Smith (ed), *Contributions to Asian Studies Vol. 4: Tradition and Change in Theravada Buddhism*, E.J. Brill, Leiden The Netherlands, 1973, p.8.

national independence from Europe. For the educated Sinhalese elite, having accepted the notion that a religion should in its entirety be consistent with its stated principles, proceeded to reject the popular or folk form of their own religion for precisely the same reasons given by the colonialist scholars. And when Thai Buddhists subsequently looked to the example of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism as a model for modernist Buddhist movements in their own country it was this same essentially European constructed, or destructed, form of Buddhism (a doctrinal religion which denied its seemingly inconsistent popular forms) which was likewise ironically held up as quintessentially symbolising "Thainess" and Thai independence from the West. Contemporary doctrinal Buddhism in the Theravâda countries of Southeast Asia has thus in effect been reconstructed and re-interpreted around the rationalist assumptions of the first European Indologists and Buddhologists, and strictly speaking is more a symbol of cultural fusion and internationalism between East and West than of any inherent "Asianness".

In re-asserting Buddhism's intellectual significance some modernist and nationalist interpreters of Buddhism in Thailand, such as Buddhadāsa, have assumed the very principles of rationality, logical consistency and scientific methodology which were previously used to denigrate Buddhism. There has been a tremendous intellectual effort on the part of Buddhists to disprove the earlier critical claims of Western scholars, that Buddhism was a superstitious and inconsistent religion, by attempting to demonstrate that their religion is in fact rational, logical and scientific.

The desire to demonstrate the intellectual significance of Buddhism by comparing it with Western notions is shown most clearly in the attempts to prove the scientific character of the religion. As previously noted science also has importance for Buddhadāsa's doctrinal re-interpretations in providing a basis for alleviating or ending suffering, the Buddhist religious goal, at the material level. Demonstrating a harmony between Buddhism and science is therefore not only significant in terms of imputing intellectual stature to Buddhism, by associating it with the theoretical respect accorded to science, but is also important in ensuring that there are no contradictions or barriers to integrating the material benefits of modern science and technology into a revised interpretation of Buddhist salvation. Buddhadāsa has said that Buddhism and science,

> are alike in that scientific principles can stand proof - one may provide the proof himself for others to see, or be willing to let anyone scrutinise, test, and cross-question as he wishes, and it bears up until no further

testing can be done and he must believe.[10]

The argument that the spiritual truths of Buddhism are open to experiential verification in a way that is assumed to be similar to the method of validating scientific results is a claim commonly made by Buddhists. For example, the Sri Lankan Buddhist thinker Jayatilleke says,

> I find that early Buddhism [i.e. Theravāda] emphasises the importance of the scientific outlook in dealing with the problems of morality and religion. Its specific "dogmas" are said to be capable of verification and its general account of the nature of man and the universe is one that accords with the findings of science rather than being at variance with them.[11]

And Spencer, an English convert to Buddhism, adds,

> There can be no question that Buddhism is the one system, excepting perhaps science itself, which achieves an objective and detached view towards the nature and destiny of man.[12]

While there is clearly an enthusiasm for science and the scientific method among some contemporary Buddhist thinkers this does not mean that there is a clear appreciation or even an interest in epistemological issues and debates concerning scientific method. While both Buddhadāsa and Jayatilleke above claim that there is a congruence between the Buddhist approach to gaining spiritual insight and the verificationist methodology of science no mention is made of the competing falsificationist view on the workings of science and neither is there any attempt to demonstrate a close relationship between Buddhist thought and falsificationism. In these tracts science is instead regarded as a static, abstract ideal of epistemological perfection rather than as the somewhat more fuzzy-edged activity recent studies have claimed it to be. This idealised view of science found in many Buddhist works suggests that the actual relation between science and Buddhism is not the real issue being discussed but that what is being attempted is a justification of or an apologetic for Buddhist teachings in which science appears only for the sake of granting what is assumed to be its imprimatorial seal of approval.

That Buddhists are not prepared to fully accept scientific rationalism is shown by the fact that claims for Buddhism's scientific character are most often based on

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[10]Buddhadāsa, *Buddhism in 15 Minutes*, trans. H.G. Grether, Suriyaban Publishers, Bangkok, no publication date given, p.18.

[11]K.N. Jayatilleke, "Buddhism and the Scientific Revolution" in *Buddhism and Science*, no editor given, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy Sri Lanka, 1980, pp.2-3.

[12]Robert F. Spencer, "The Relation of Buddhism to Modern Science", in *Buddhism and Science*, no editor given, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy Sri Lanka, 1980, p.12.

references to the *Kàlàma Sutta*. In Chapter One I traced such claims about the purported rationality of Buddhism to a particularly liberal and one-sided reading of the Buddha's statements in the *Kàlàma Sutta*, which some apologists have taken as presenting a sort of "scientific method" of spiritual enquiry. Buddhadàsa, for example, reads the *Kàlàma Sutta* as warning not to blindly believe in either the *Tipiṭaka*, a teacher, what is reported or rumoured, what has been reasoned out or what has been arrived at by logic. He says,

> Although we may have read, listened and heard, we should not simply accept what is offered in these ways unless we have first thought it over, considered it carefully, fathomed it out, examined it, and seen clearly that it really is so.[13]

However, the crucial distinguishing point between any scientific or rationalistic method of investigation and the Buddha's pronouncements in the *Kàlàma Sutta* is that according to the latter one is to be as wary of the results of reason and logic as of rumour and report. Buddhadàsa acknowledges this when he says that "seeing clearly" means to apprehend truth or reality, "without needing to use reason, without needing to speculate, without needing to make assumptions."[14] That is, despite claims of the rationality or scientific character of Buddhist doctrine the *Kàlàma Sutta* is in fact a call for developing direct spiritual insight into reality, not for following a scientific method of enquiry. And while upon close scrutiny it can be seen that the *Kàlàma Sutta* does not contain a call for the implementation of the scientific method in Buddhism it is nonetheless the case that Buddhadàsa and others do consider the authority accorded science to rub off onto a Buddhism purportedly demonstrated to be "scientific". Buddhadàsa claims,

> Thus is there not a clear indication of how Buddhism goes by nature with science, which the modern world everywhere honours? And the most important point is: when Buddhism alone is one with the world's science then which religion is fit to be the religion of the world besides Buddhism?[15]

Thus while the relationship between Buddhism and science is undoubtedly important for Buddhadàsa, given his concern to incorporate the material alleviation of suffering within the religious scope of Buddhism, it cannot be said that the issues involved have either been adequately appreciated or presented, or resolved.

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[13]Buddhadàsa, *Buddha-dhamma For Students*, trans. Ariyananda Bhikkhu, Sublime Life Mission, Bangkok, 1982, p.16.

[14]ibid. p.15.

[15]id., *Buddhism in 15 Minutes*, p.19.

But while claims concerning the "scientific" character of Buddhism are strictly speaking invalid, or at least poorly presented, it is nevertheless the case that there is a fundamental congruence between the doctrinal, demythologised Buddhism that Buddhadāsa presents and Western rationalism. As noted above Buddhadāsa emphasises the doctrinal aspect of Buddhism and rejects the traditional popular or lay aspects of the religion in an attempt to integrate a positive valuation of action in the social world with core Buddhist doctrines. Popular Buddhism in Thailand is often associated with beliefs in the power of supernatural entities which can be placated, cajoled or enraged and which it is believed have the ability to intervene in human life, whether for good or for bad. It is also popularly believed that the performance of certain defined rituals can ward off harmful interventions by demons and conversely can promote beneficial interventions by benevolent spirits. Strict doctrinal Buddhism, however, has always been dominated by notions of immutable impersonal law, the law of *kamma* and the overarching cosmic-moral order of righteousness or *dhamma*, to which all are inescapably subject. It is the existence of such universal laws which gives sense to the Theravāda Buddhist teaching that salvation lies in the hands of the individual. In Buddhism the cosmos is a consistently and thoroughly ordered system where both suffering and salvation result from the systematic operation of such principles as *kamma* and *dhamma*. Salvation or *nibbāna* in Theravāda is the result of systematically applying and utilising these universal principles. In positing the existence of immuteable universal laws the doctrinal Buddhism which Buddhadāsa gives weight to, like Western rationalism, also emphasises the consistent application of general principles.

Popular Buddhist beliefs are often strictly speaking in contradiction with doctrine. For example, such beliefs as the transferability of religious merit or good *kamma* between individuals, that there is personal continuity after death, and that *nibbāna* can be attained as a result of an enormous accumulation of merit rather than through liberative insight, cannot be justified by Buddhist doctrine but are nonetheless widely adhered to. Such popular Buddhist beliefs represent attempts to circumvent or evade the consequences of the universal cosmic laws proposed by the doctrinal core of the religion. These contradictions of popular belief with doctrine have long been recognised and have been accepted as the unavoidable corruption of the Buddha's teachings by the world-involved minds of laypeople who are unable to grasp the subtleties of the true transcendent doctrine. The divison between strict doctrinal Buddhism based on notions of immuteable universal law and the popular belief in the ability of spirits and supernatural influences to intervene in and in effect circumvent these laws is based upon the traditional practical distinction of a

lay path or *lokiyadhamma* from the *lokuttaradhamma* or supramundane spiritual path of the renunciate monk. The generally prevailing view among monks knowledgeable in the doctrine has been that the popular views are all that laypeople are capable of understanding. It is generally held that it is better that laypeople grasp things in their own inadequate way and so then act morally than that they be left out of Buddhism entirely because of their spiritual turpitude.

Such inconsistencies between the lay and clerical forms of Buddhism have in general been accepted and have not been subject to attempts at resolution because of the secondary place given to reason and logical analysis in the Theravâda tradition. Because theoretical knowledge has traditionally been judged in relation to its spiritual "benefit", rather than against any strict notion of rationality or logical consistency, inconsistent views may be accepted if they are regarded as being morally beneficial for those who hold them. Buddhadâsa, however, rejects the mundane-supramundane distinction upon which traditional Thai Buddhism is based and in contrast maintains that Buddhism should be doctrinally and logically consistent throughout. This doctrinalism, which seeks to consistently apply universal principles of Buddhist teaching throughout all aspects of the religion, can be seen as a rational potentiality which has been latent in doctrinal Buddhism since its inception. However, this rational potential has not been fully developed because of the mitigating influence of the two-tiered mundane-supramundane structure of Buddhist practice and teaching, and because strict logical consistency has traditionally been regarded as having only secondary importance behind the moral benefit of particular views. The rationalist implications of strict doctrinal Buddhism are only being fully realised now because of Buddhadâsa's rejection of the historical distinction between an imperfect lay and a strict, doctrinal clerical form of Buddhism and because of his implicit acceptance of Western notions of rationalism and scientific reasoning.

There is also a further reason for Buddhadâsa's strict doctrinalism or rationalism, which will be described in detail in the following chapters. Because his interpretations of Buddhism are so innovative and because his views are often without direct precedents in either the canonical scriptures or in commentaries Buddhadâsa must consequently **argue** for his views and provide justifications for his interpretations. Because his re-interpretations therefore depend upon logical argumentation and demonstration Buddhadâsa places much more emphasis upon reason than do more traditional interpreters of Buddhist doctrine, who can rely upon given and accepted sources.

Historically the contemporary concern among modernist Buddhists to make

Buddhism rational and scientific by rejecting the traditional popular animist and Brahmanical aspects of the religion has its origins in the rationalist approaches of the first scholarly European studies of Buddhism. However, while European-derived rationalism has had a triggering effect the rejection of animist and other logically contradictory beliefs has in fact revealed and brought to the fore in Buddhadāsa's work a latent rationalism which has lain in the very core of doctrinal Buddhism. Contemporary Buddhist rationalism is therefore a compound phenomenon, combining elements of both borrowed European and indigenous Buddhist rationalist methodologies. However, while structurally similar in emphasising the consistent application of general principles Western and Buddhist rationalism are nevertheless not identical. As already discussed in Chapter One reason takes second place to spiritual insight in Buddhism and it is the failure to acknowledge this basic epistemological difference that accounts for much of the confusion concerning the "scientific" character of Buddhism outlined above. Verification of hypotheses or religious doctrines by personally developed spiritual insight into truth is not at all the same thing as the empirical methodology of science.

2.3 The Influence of Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism on Buddhadāsa's Thought.

For many Thais including Buddhadāsa nationalism has become an integral component of the reclamation and review of Buddhism and in this context he appears to have been particularly influenced by the work of the Anagārika Dhammapala. Born Donald David Hevāvitārana, this Ceylonese Buddhist later assumed the title of *anagārika*, denoting a wandering ascetic, and took the Pali name of Dhammapala (lit. "protector of the *dhamma*"). With the assistance of the Theosophical Movement the Anagārika established the Mahābodhi Society in Colombo in the final decades of the last century with the goal of propagating Buddhism both in Ceylon and other countries. However, his emphasis was as much social as religious and he became a symbol of a resurgent Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and of a way to reclaim traditional cultural values oppressed by colonialism while yet supporting socio-economic modernisation.

Gokhale describes Dhammapala as combatting,

> the notion that Buddhism was a mere other-worldly philosophy calling upon man to turn his back on the world and all its affairs. He maintained that Buddhism was meant as much for the monk as the layman (*upasaka*) and in the context of the modern age the *dharma* of the *upasaka* needs re-assertion and re-interpretation as much as the revival of monastic learning. Buddhism of the layman addresses itself to both material prosperity and

spiritual growth.[16]

The Anagârika aimed for a fusion of modern technology and economic methods with Buddhist values and cited with considerable admiration the achievements of Japan, which he saw as exemplifying the beneficial results of such a fusion. The similarities between the Anagârika's and Buddhadâsa's own views are striking, each of the above points - interest in a this-worldly religion, concern for laypeople, a desire for the integration of scientific and religious approaches, and admiration of Japan - being paralleled in Buddhadâsa's own work. Perhaps the commonality of the social contexts in which Buddhadâsa and the Anagârika have worked explains the closeness of their respective views. However, the fact that Buddhadâsa was in contact with the Mahâbodhi Society and its publications in the 1930's through his brother Dhammadâsa also strongly suggests that his views have received at least some influence and direction from the early Buddhist reform and nationalist movements in Ceylon.

2.4 The Influence of Socio-Economic Change in Thailand on Buddhadâsa's Thought.

2.4.1 Conflict in Modern Thai Society.

In addition to the broad cultural and intellectual impact of the West on Asia social changes specific to Thailand have also been important influences on Buddhadâsa's work. The penetration of new ideas and technologies via novel means of communication and transportation has underpinned a broad general transformation in values and expectations among the Thai populace. The relation between social and economic change and Buddhadâsa's re-interpretations of Buddhist doctrine is complex, involving conflicts between and changing aspirations among the diverse groupings of the Thai cultural and political elites. In particular Buddhadâsa's views can be seen as responses to the religious and moral dilemmas facing the modernist, intellectual section of the Thai elite, who make up Buddhadâsa's main audience in Thailand and of which Buddhadâsa is himself a member. To detail these social and intellectual relations, however, it is first necessary to describe the dynamic socio-economic situation in modern Thailand.

While modernisation is affecting the lives of all Thais it is nevertheless only a relatively small Thai urban elite of military and government bureaucrats, influential

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[16] Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, "Anagarika Dhammapala: Toward Modernity Through Tradition in Ceylon", in Bardwell L. Smith (ed), *Contributions to Asian Studies Vol.4: Tradition and Change in Theravada Buddhism*, E.J. Brill, Leiden The Netherlands, 1973, p.39.

businessmen, teachers, lecturers, students, writers and artists who have any significant decision-making power in the process of modernisation. As a teacher of a modernist interpretation of Buddhism Buddhadâsa's main audience and supporters are found amongst Buddhists who are explicitly concerned with the issues of Thailand's modernisation and of the country's socio-economic development. Nearly all Buddhadâsa's supporters are members of the numerically small urban-based Thai elite who dominate the country politically, economically and culturally. Furthermore, Buddhadâsa's supporters are drawn from only specific sections of the elite and it is important to note that while small in absolute terms the group controlling and managing Thailand's political, economic, educational and cultural life is still highly heterogeneous, being vertically split into a hierarchy based on relative power and laterally split at each level of that hierarchy by conflicting ideological allegiances and political perceptions. Wilson has divided the Thai elite into three hierarchical tiers[17] which make up a pyramid of power and influence. He locates a small group of ten to fifteen people - military commanders, civilian political leaders and some aristocratic figures - at the top of this pyramid. These are the people who are potentially capable of dominating the elite and thereby the rest of the country because of their access to and ability to manipulate key political forces. The second tier of the Thai elite isolated by Wilson is made up of about one thousand senior figures - high ranking armed forces officers, special grade civil servants, some parliamentary leaders and a few powerful businessmen. The third level, at the base of the pyramid, are, in the words of Daniel Wit,

> The educated, interested and reasonably articulate thousands of persons resident in Bangkok and a few provincial towns who, whether within or without the public bureaucracy, are the Thai equivalent of the middle classes ... composed of high school and university graduates and their equivalent, most are middle-level bureaucrats with lesser numbers of professional and white collar personnel, writers and journalists and businessmen. They are attuned to the political currents and are even willing to be critical, but few are anxious for revolutionary changes.[18]

Apart from divisions arising from personal allegiances to one or other powerful military, bureaucratic or political patron (a significant feature of all Thai political and bureaucratic life) there are definite ideological and political divisions within the elite between traditionalist and progressive groups. For both the traditionalist and progressive sections of the elite the same complex of issues focussing on national

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[17] David Wilson, *Politics in Thailand*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca N.Y., 1962, pp.60-67.

[18] Wit, p.103.

development, nationalism, Buddhism and appropriate national political forms dominate intellectual debate, but both sections systematically disagree on each of these issues. In brief the traditionalist sections of the Thai elite support strong links with Western countries and reliance upon Western models of development based upon significant foreign investment together with an opening of the economy to high levels of foreign business penetration. The progressives, while not necessarily in disagreement with the basic capitalist model of socio-economic development, are more openly critical of the deleterious cultural and economic effects of unrestricted reliance upon the West. In contrast they tend to support the idea of a Thai-based model of development which refers to Buddhist rather than to capitalist paradigms. This emphasis on a Buddhist-based economic framework for development is reflected in such books as *Setthasàt Chòeng Phut* ("เศรษฐศาสตร์เชิงพุทธ" *Buddhist Economics*)(T)[19] a translation and commentary upon E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*, and in articles such as Wisit Wangwinyû's "Thân Phutthât Kap Setthasàt Châw Phut" ("ท่านพุทธทาสกับเศรษฐศาสตร์ชาวพุทธ" "Buddhadàsa and Buddhist Economics")(T)[20]

The traditionalists' economic and technological reliance upon the West is associated with a vehement opposition to communism; the firing of a strong Thai nationalism among the populace to resist communist ideological infiltration; maintaining political and military links with the West, particularly America; and a preference for a strong, centralised military-backed if not military-led government in Bangkok. The progressives on the other hand seek to develop and strengthen Thai national identity as a cultural barrier to Western and Japanese as well as communist incursions into Thai socio-cultural traditions. The progressives seek an

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19 Châw Asòk (ชาวอโศก) (trans), *Setthasàt Chòeng Phut* ("เศรษฐศาสตร์เชิงพุทธ" *Buddhist Economics*), in *Khwâm Lom-lèw Khòrng Setthasàt Samay Maì Phror Mai Soncai Setthasàt Chòeng Phut* ("ความล้มเหลวของเศรษฐศาสตร์สมัยใหม่เพราะไม่สนใจเศรษฐศาสตร์เชิงพุทธ" *The Collapse of Modern Economics Because of the Lack of Interest in Buddhist Economics*), Mûlanithi Thammasanti (มูลนิธิธรรมสันติ), Bangkok, 2525 (1982): being a partial translation of and commentary upon E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*.

20 Wisit Wangwinyû (วิศิษฐ์ วังวิญญู), "Thân Phutthathât Kap Setthasàt Châw Phut" ("ท่านพุทธทาสกับเศรษฐศาสตร์ชาวพุทธ" "Buddhadàsa and Buddhist Economics"), in Khanakammakân Sàsanâ Phŷa Kân-phatanâ (คณะกรรมการศาสนาเพื่อการพัฒนา) (ed) (no individual editor given), *Phutthathât Kap Khon Run Mai* ("พุทธทาสกับคนรุ่นใหม่" *Buddhadàsa and the New Generation*), Mûlanithi Kômol Khîmthòrng (มูลนิธิโกมลคีมทอง), Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.24ff.

independent rather than a derivative Thai cultural identity and support internal political democracy as a vehicle for social justice within the country. The progressives among the Thai elite are thus by and large liberals and democrats, with a strong commitment to establishing Thailand's political, economic and cultural independence within the modern global order. These progressives can in many ways be identified as the Thai intelligentsia, consisting mainly of university and college teachers, students, writers, artists, some labour leaders, some outspoken monks such as Buddhadâsa, and lower ranking but educated government officials committed to national development.

A large proportion of the progressive section of the Thai elite are members of what Ben Anderson calls the "new bourgeois strata", which has grown rapidly in size as a result of substantial post World War II American and Japanese investment in Thailand. Anderson says that this "new bourgeois" is,

> rather small and frail to be sure, but in significant respects [it is] outside of and partially antagonistic to the old feudal-bureaucratic class.[21]

The new bourgeois consists of administrative, executive and managerial workers, professionals and technicians, and service and recreation workers, most of whom have received some level of tertiary education. While strictly speaking neither radical nor leftist this new bourgeois stands in some degree of opposition to the traditional military, bureaucratic and aristocratic Thai elite whose established interests are often seen as hindering the new bourgeois' social mobility and advancement.

Apart from a couple of brief interludes, such as the 1973-1976 period of civilian government, it has been the traditionalists who have dominated the Thai political scene since the 1932 revolution. More often than not the progressive members of the Thai elite have been in a defensive rather than offensive position. In terms of Wilson's conception of the Thai elite's three tiered pyramidal structure the top rung and most of the positions of the middle rung are dominated by traditionalists and their supporters. Most progressives are isolated from any real exercise of power, being in the third and lowest rung of the elite hierarchy, only a very few managing to establish themselves in influential middle level management or decision-making positions.

The Buddhist hierarchy of monks or *saṅgha* has inevitably but often unwillingly become involved in the theoretical and political tension and conflicts

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[21] **Ben Anderson**, "Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup", in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol.9 No.3 July-Sept. 1977, p.13.

between the traditionalist and progressive sections of the Thai elite. As already outlined institutional Buddhism in Thailand is aligned with and has been moulded by successive conservative regimes as a religious legitimation of those regimes' political policies. The progressive elements of the Thai elite are as a consequence as dissatisfied with the conservative *saṅgha* hierarchy as they are with the various regimes which have manipulated the official clerical representatives of Buddhism. Because of the association of the *saṅgha* with the dominant conservative, militarist and monarchist sections of the elite any significant re-interpretation or reform of Buddhist doctrine or practice which broke or weakened this politico-religious relation could not but have political implications. And indeed the various criticisms of Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations of doctrine discussed in succeeding chapters have as much basis in political disputes between the traditionalist and progressive sections of the Thai elite as in disputes over strictly doctrinal matters.

Indeed, a significant determinant of the high degree of support for Buddhadāsa's re-interpretative work from progressive sections of the elite derives from his dissociation from the conservatively aligned *saṅgha* hierarchy. Progressive Thai Buddhists also support Buddhadāsa because of his commitment to a Buddhist-based notion of development which is founded upon a critique of the traditional interpretations of the religion sponsored by both the official *saṅgha* hierarchy and the majority of the traditionalist sections of the elite. Seri Phongphit, an academic philosopher, notes Buddhadāsa's popularity among progressive intellectuals as follows,

> His [Buddhadāsa's] line of thought has an influence on a large number of Thai intellectuals, thinkers and writers and he seems to be accepted and admired by intellectuals more than by other groups, especially since 14th October 1973[22] when his thought - as presented by himself and by others - has become increasingly clearly concerned with social and political affairs.(T)[23]

For progressive Thais Buddhadāsa's reforms have great socio-cultural

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[22] On 14th October 1973 the regime of Thanom Kittikachorn was toppled after several days of student-led rioting in Bangkok. The period from October 1973 until October 1976 saw a brief, turbulent liberalisation of Thai society under a series of popularly elected governments. Military rule was re-established by a violent coup in October 1976.

[23] Seri Phongphit (เสรี พงศ์พิศ), "Thamma Kap Kān-myang: Thān Phutthathāt Kap Sangkhom Thai" ("ธรรมะกับการเมือง – ท่านพุทธทาสกับสังคมไทย" "Dhamma and Politics: Buddhadāsa and Thai Soceity"), in Khanakammakān Sāsanā Phya Kān-phatanā (คณะกรรมการศาสนาเพื่อการพัฒนา), *Thān Phutthathāt Nai Thatsana Khōrng Nakwichākān* ("ท่านพุทธทาสในทัศนะของนักวิชาการ" *Buddhadāsa in the View of Academics*), Bangkok, 2525 (1982) p.33.

significance for he is regarded as aiding efforts to define "Thai-ness" and national identity in terms other than the jingoistic ideal propounded by the Thai military and monarchy. The progressives desire a new Thai Buddhist identity which both defines their cultural uniqueness and their place in the world. This desire is expressed by Phra Prachā Pasannathammō, a follower of Buddhadāsa, who in a paper entitled "Thān Phutthathāt Kap Patiwat Watthanatham" ("ท่านพุทธทาสกับปฏิวัติวัฒนธรรม") or "Buddhadāsa and Cultural Revolution"(T)[24] gives one chapter section the heading, "Ekalaksana Khōrng Thai Lae Sākon-niyom Bāēp Phut" ("เอกลักษณะของไทยและสากลนิยมแบบพุทธ") or "Thai Identity and Buddhist Internationalism"(T)[25]. Phra Prachā explains the cultural importance attached to Buddhadāsa's work when he says,

> He [Buddhadāsa] enjoins us to see the value of a "Thai-ness" which is not simply a return to the former national or self-infatuation that we are, or are of, a nation which is more excellent than and superior to other nations. And it is different from the superficial nationalism of Rama VI [King Wachirawut] and the mad nationalism current in the time of Field Marshal Phibul Songkhram[26]. And it is also different from the contemporary official propaganda [about Thai national identity] which is only the refuse of "Thai-ness" and which does not lead to an understanding of the core [of being Thai] itself.
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> The fact that contemporary Thais have been separated from their "Thainess", that they feel alienated and have lost a sense of pride in their own country, is because the social leaders of the past one hundred years have not used their intellect to seriously question the true character of our identity. Because they have been blindly following the tails of the <u>farang</u> [Westerners] Indian-file ... Buddhadāsa is an important person who points out what is the true core of being Thai that we should protect, that we should be proud of and should support and nurture. At the same time he does not refrain from criticising our weak points ... but what is even more important is that he is a person who can progress from "Thainess" through Buddhism to also be a universalist. I regard this as finding the most appropriate type of identity.(T)[27]

Phra Prachā thus sees Buddhadāsa as providing a Thai-Buddhist base for an international identity.

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[24] (Phra) **Prachā** Pasannathammō ((พระ) ประชา ปสนฺนธมฺโม), "Thān Phutthathāt Kap Patiwat Watthanatham" ("ท่านพุทธทาสกับปฏิวัติวัฒนธรรม" , "Buddhadāsa and the Cultural Revolution"), being a chapter in *Sī Nak-khit Ruam Samay* ("สี่นักคิดร่วมสมัย" *Four Contemporary Thinkers*), by the same author, Samnak-phim Thianwan, Bangkok, 2526 (1983), pp.1-61.

[25] ibid. p.50.

[26] Phibun Songkhram was a military ruler of Thailand in the 1950s.

[27] ibid. pp.50-51.

Thai Buddhism's institutional role in legitimating the traditionalist military-monarchist elite has created disenchantment with official Buddhism among the rising middle and intellectual classes, who are outside of the old system of *saṅgha*-monarchy-military-bureaucracy alliances. The rising classes are seeking an alternative definition and approach to Buddhism which can be used both to oppose the traditional religio-social order which limits their chances for advancement and to simultaneously promote their own interests and view of the world. In this situation of conflict Buddhadāsa's modernist doctrinal reforms have been taken up as an important component of the alternative Buddhist ideology sought by the Thai middle classes or new bourgeois.

2.4.2 Buddhadāsa's Background and Relation to the Thai New Bourgeois.

It is significant that Buddhadāsa's family background and educational experience reveal him to be a member of the section of Thai society which today constitutes his largest audience, the lower rung of the educated elite. Buddhadāsa was born in 1906[28] into a commercial family whose members appear to have highly valued education and social advancement through the traditionally recognised channels of the monkhood and the government service. For example, Buddhadāsa's younger brother, Dhammadāsa, was educated at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, the most prestigious tertiary institution in the country which was established in the first decades of this century for the purpose of providing Thais with the training necessary to occupy posts in the expanding government bureaucracy of the newly modernising country.

Dhammadāsa appears to have had a major influence on Buddhadāsa and to have taken as keen if not keener an interest in Buddhism as his older brother. Dhammadāsa was particularly impressed by the propagation of Buddhism in the West by Japanese and Ceylonese Buddhists. In letters written to Buddhadāsa while he was a student at Chulalongkorn University Dhammadāsa appears somewhat amazed by these Buddhist missionary efforts,

> Our Buddhism must certainly have something good, enough to be able to boast to the farangs about it.(T)[29]

> Foreigners who used to hold to other religions have become interested in Buddhism, and devote their time and energy to propagating it and making it widespread. Why then don't we Thai, who are true Buddhists, think to

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[28]For further biographical details on Buddhadāsa see Appendix II

[29]Cited by Chit Phibānthaēn, p.103.

do as the foreigners?(T)[30]

When he returned to manage the family business in Phumriang near Chaiya in 1929 Dhammadâsa continued his interest in Buddhism by setting up a small lending library on Buddhism at the family store. He also started a Buddhist discussion group which he called the Khana Sonthanâtham (คณะสนทนาธรรม), "The Dhamma Discussion Group", and which in later years developed into the Thammathân Mûlanithi (ธรรมทานมูลนิธิ), the Dhammadâna Foundation.

But in addition to his brother Buddhadâsa's intellectual direction was also influenced by events during his stay in Bangkok at the beginning of the 1930s, when he attempted to obtain an ecclesiastical degree. At the time Buddhadâsa was in Bangkok one Narin Phâsit arranged for his daughters to become *sâmanerî* or novice nuns. It was Narin's wish to promote the *dhamma*, which he regarded as having decayed because the *saṅgha* no longer had the full complement of both monks and nuns as in the Buddha's time; the official order of Theravâda nuns having fallen into decay before the Thais became Buddhist over seven hundred years ago. Narin also established a temple called Wat Nârîwong for nuns in his attempt to revive the tradition of female ordination. Narin contacted the Khana Sonthanâtham seeking support for his moves, because under Dhammadâsa's leadership and frequent letter writing to newspapers and journals his discussion group had become widely known as being interested in reforming Buddhism. Dhammadâsa at first supported Narin and informed him of Buddhadâsa's own reformist interests. However, Buddhadâsa disagreed with Narin, apparently not so much because of doctrinal differences as because he felt the way Narin had gone about his project of re-establishing the Theravâda order of nuns amounted to an attack on the sanctity of the *saṅgha*.

Narin and his ideas were generally criticised and his project was finally abandoned because of the vehemence of oposition both from within and outside the *saṅgha*. Yet despite his opposition to the project Buddhadâsa seems to have been deeply affected by the Narin episode. He became concerned that people like Narin could so easily criticise the *saṅgha* and was led to consider what lackings there must be in the Thai monkhood that left it so open to attack. The problem of the degeneration fo the *saṅgha* occupied Buddhadâsa more and more and he began a deeper personal study of the scriptures in an attempt to glean the Buddha's actual intentions and teachings, and to judge the modern *saṅgha* against them.

While current issues such as modernisation and socio-economic development no

[30] ibid. p.114

doubt occupied Buddhadâsa's mind at this time, and became more pronounced in his writings with the passage of the years, in and of themselves these were not the original motivating force behind his reformist efforts. Rather, from his position inside the *saṅgha* he appears to have been more concerned with preventing the attacks of such modernist laypersons as Narin. In coming to regard Narin's and others' criticisms of the Thai *saṅgha* as flowing from a decay or degeneration of the monkhood Buddhadâsa also accepted the modernist values which underlay those criticisms. However, like any true conservative he saw the solution to the degeneration of Thai Buddhism as not lying in a one-sided accommodation of the *saṅgha* to modernist views. Instead Buddhadâsa sought to purify Buddhism by returning to the original teachings and instructions of the Buddha. He thought that because the *saṅgha* had so degenerated as to become the object of attacks from the lay populace the original teachings must have been lost or at least suffered misinterpretation. In Buddhadâsa's view criticisms that the *saṅgha* was out of line with contemporary society, and even a retarding and negative social influence, were not to be met by simply modernising the monkhood. With faith in the universality of the Buddha's message of salvation Buddhadâsa thought that once the original form of Buddhism was refound and expressed anew the religion's universal and thus current relevance would once again become transparently clear.

However, over and above these events it is also important to note that Buddhadâsa received encouragement from his family when it became clear that he wished to utilise his obvious intellectual talents in the religious domain. Because of his family background Buddhadâsa would have had a keen personal awareness of the aspirations of upwardly mobile but non-aristocratic educated Thais, the new bourgeois. This is shown by his strong identification with the bureaucrats and junior army officers who together overthrew the absolute Thai monarchy in 1932 in order to establish a popular government under a reconstituted constitutional monarchy. Buddhadâsa saw a close relation between the political revolution of 1932 and his own mission to reform Buddhist teachings and practice, which began in the same year,

> In the country there was a revolution, a reform concerning the governing of the land; for we temple-dwellers, we religious, there was the intention to revolutionise or reform activities relating to religion. We wanted the revival, promotion, study and practice of religion, to improve it to the extent that it could be called a reform.(T)[31]

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[31] **Phutthathāt**, *Thalāengkān Sūan Mōk* 50 *Pī* ("แถลงการณ์สวนโมกข์ 50 ปี" *Communique on the Fiftieth Anniversary of Sūan Mōk*), Samnak-phim Sukhaphāp-cai, Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.2.

Kirsch has observed that the rising Thai commercial and administrative classes have been the strongest supporters of religious modernisation and reform since the last century. He says that the religious reforms of King Mongkut (Rama IV) - reforms which I argued above form a basis for Buddhadāsa's own re-interpretations - received their strongest support from,

> among the group of local leaders, schoolteachers, store keepers, and a nascent group of local traders who are also oriented to national concerns and are the innovators and modernisers of village society. This situation suggests that there is a social and psychological "fit" between a modernising and national outlook among local leaders and the [particular] Buddhist orientation fostered by Mongkut's modernising reforms.[32]

That is, it is those Thais who, through higher education or experience of socio-economic development, have come to perceive their place and the place of their country in a broader, more international or global perspective who are the most dissatisfied with the traditional interpretation and practice of Buddhism and who are the strongest supporters of modernising religious reforms.

The strong support for Buddhadāsa's views from members of the new Thai bourgeois is due to the reflection in his work of the social, political and religious issues which preoccupy the educated Thai middle class. In his various reforms of doctrine and teaching Buddhadāsa has not only addressed what he sees as the need to reform Thai Buddhism but also at the same time the new bourgeois' perceived need for religious reform. In particular Buddhadāsa's work directly addresses some difficult religious and ideological dilemmas facing the lay Thai Buddhist intelligentsia.

Since King Mongkut's religious reforms in the middle of the last century an emphasis on doctrinal consistency in Buddhism has also been apparent among progressive sections of the traditional Thai elite. And while the overwhelming majority of Buddhadāsa's supporters are members of the intelligentsia or the new bourgeois there are also members of the traditional elite who adhere strongly to his views. For example, a former high ranking army officer, one Major General Dej

[32]Kirsch, "Modernising Implications of Nineteenth Century Reforms in the Thai Sangha", p.62.

Tulawanthana[33] has written a series of books promoting Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations of Buddhism. Major General Dej felt that the Thai texts of Buddhism that he had read contradicted the doctrine of *anattā* and the principles of science, making Buddhism seem boring, confused, behind the times and, "inappropriate for the new generation of intellectuals who have free knowledge and free thought."(T)[34] Major General Dej says he has written the series of books, all of which liberally cite Buddhadāsa,

> In order to help redeem Buddhism (so that future generations of Thais will still find Buddhism in existence as their inheritance) before it disappears from Thailand because of an abandonment of *anattā*.(T)[35]

Strictly speaking it is necessary to distinguish two groups within Thai society who support Buddhadāsa's doctrinal re-interpretations. The first group consists of progressive intellectuals or members of the new bourgeois or new generation of younger, Western-educated Thais. These people see in Buddhadāsa's work not only a scientific or rational presentation of Buddhism but also the foundations of an alternative Thai Buddhist identity and an alternative Thai society which embodies notions of democracy and justice. The second, much smaller group, exemplified by Major General Dej, is well-entrenched in the traditional Thai elite and sees in Buddhadāsa's work not the basis of an alternative Thailand but rather simply a rational, non-superstitious Buddhism. This second group are modernist to the extent of disparaging "superstitious", animist and Brahmanical aspects of Thai religion but in general are not interested in reforming the contemporary social order in any significant way. In contrast the new generation of Buddhists see their religion as a social faith capable of re-establishing pride in Thai identity and of assisting in the progressive modernisation of Thai society. In this study the analytical focus is on

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[33] Major General Dej Tulawanthana's (เดช ตุลวรรธนะ) books provide the following biographical information. He was born in 1915 (2458) and was educated in Thailand. After graduating from military school in 1933 (2476) took up a command as a second lieutenant ( ) in the artillery. He subsequently made observation tours overseas and has had personal interests in politics, military studies, economics and social psychology, which he has followed up in several European countries at his own expense. He has also been a member of many civilian committees and organisations, most notably the Thai National Organisation for the Promotion of Sport.

[34] (Phol. Trī) Dēt Tulawanthana ((พล.,ตรี) เดช ตุลวรร,ธนะ), *Rīan Phutthasāsanā Yāng Panyāchon - Lem* 1 ("เรียนพุทธศาสนาอย่างปัญญาชน – เล่ม 1" - *Study Buddhism Like an Intellectual - Book* 1), Borisat Thai I.E., Bangkok, 2526 (1983), Introduction.

[35]ibid.

Buddhadāsa's supporters among the new bourgeois rather than in the Thai establishment. This is because it is the members of the intelligentsia and new bourgeois who are the most vocal supporters of Buddhadāsa's work and who have done the most to promote his ideas and interpretations of doctrine. While there are isolated members of the military and other traditionally privileged and powerful sections of Thai society who sponsor Buddhadāsa's modernist approach, unlike the new bourgeois they do not form a unified grouping and in general de-emphasise the ideological component of his work.

2.4.3 Religious and Ideological Dilemmas Facing Progressive Lay Thai Buddhists.

The life of the modern Thai urban dweller, pervasively influenced by the "revolution of rising expectations", the ethic of progress and the spoils of modernity, is radically different from the traditional ways of living for which Buddhism, the religion of over ninety five percent of Thais, has traditionally provided the integrative value system. As a consequence there is a growing questioning of the relevance of Buddhism to the new Thai society now in the process of developing. More and more Thais, especially among the progressive educated urban dwellers, are questioning the apropriateness of Buddhist practices and doctrines which developed from and were directed towards an altogether different social order. Siddhi Butr-Indr echoes the feelings of many thinking Thai Buddhists when he says,

> Unless the spiritual principles of religion can be translated in terms of social ideals, values and interests or can influence worldly affairs, they will not survive as far as society as a whole is concerned.[36]

Social modernisation has raised two broad sets of issues for traditional Buddhism. At the social or institutional level the question is whether a religion which has traditionally legitimised the largely static socio-economic and political structures of Thai society can be re-interpreted and utilised to provide ideological support for and legitimation of fundamental social change. And secondly, at the level of personal ethics Buddhists supportive of modernisation must deal with the fact that Buddhist teachings have traditionally defined material values as ultimately being in opposition with the religious ideal of transcendent enlightenment or *nibbāna*. As Rupp observes, for a religious system to remain viable in a modernising twentieth century society it cannot avoid the issue of the religious significance of, "man's increasing capacity to shape his personal and corporate life within the sphere

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[36]Siddhi Butr-Indr, *The Social Philosophy of Buddhism*, Mahamakut Buddhist University Press, Bangkok, 1979, p.8.

of phenomenal existence."[37] This ethical problem can be summarised as whether, in attaining salvation from suffering, the emphasis of religion should be on adjusting one's desires to the reality of a hostile world - or whether it should be on changing the world to fit in with one's desires. Underlying the doctrinal reforms of Buddhadāsa can be seen a desire to establish the pursuit of material well-being as a religious value in its own right while yet not denying or devaluing the traditional spiritual verities. Buddhadāsa thus tackles the contemporary religious dilemma of the need to resolve the conflict between upholding the traditional approaches to Buddhist teaching and practice, and risk seeing Buddhism become increasingly socially irrelevant, and accepting the benefits of modernisation and risking the materialisation of the religion and the consequent loss of its spiritual values.

The wish of many intellectual Buddhists is for Buddhism to act as the ideological foundation of a religious and moral approach to socio-economic development, as a unique Thai alternative to both capitalism and communism. As a key focus of Thai national and cultural identity Buddhism is regarded as having the potential of providing a cultural and institutional link between Thailand's rich cultural past and the general hope for a more prosperous but still independent future. In this context the twin demands being placed upon Buddhism by progressive intellectuals are firstly that it promote or at least support economic development and modernisation and secondly that it direct a primary emphasis to the concerns of this world, here and now.

But while these broad issues of the relevance and place of Buddhism in modern Thailand underlie the pervasive concern of thinking Buddhists for the future of their religion most contemporary religious analyses and debates on these points are couched in much more specific terms, in terms of the perceived failure of institutional Buddhism or the Thai *saṅgha* to meet the needs of Thai men and women in the twentieth century. It is the *saṅgha*, the traditional monastic organisation of Buddhism in Thailand, which is the focus of criticisms which arise from the disillusionment of the progressive sections of the Thai educated elite with the intellectual, political and ritualistic conservatism of officially sponsored institutional Buddhism. As Swearer notes,

> The generally low educational level of the average monk and monastic pre-occupation with ritual and ceremony has led to widespread alienation of

[37] George Rupp, "The Relationship Between Nirvana and Samsara", in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.21, 1971, p.67.

the intelligentsia from institutional Buddhism.[38]

Pun Congprasôet, the late founder of a lay Buddhist revivalist movement, The Sublime Life Mission[39] and long time supporter of Buddhadāsa concurs with Swearer's view,

> These days the majority of those who have been ordained are devoid of knowledge about either the world or *dhamma*. This is because they are too lazy to study and seek out knowledge, and because their only aim is looking for money. Consequently they are incapable of correctly answering questions about the *dhamma*. What those who have been ordained propagate has in the main become mere ignorant nonsense.(T)[40]

The *saṅgha* is the focus for criticism because in Theravâda Buddhism religious authority in matters of doctrinal interpretation has traditionally been centralised in the hierarchy of monks. Historically the Buddhist layperson has not been regarded as having significant religious standing, and as a result lay frustrations deriving from the perceived irrelevance of the religion in the face of modern expectations tend to be directed towards the traditional holders of spiritual authority, the monks.

However, there is an additional countervailing factor in Thai Buddhism which would seem to make the development of these lay frustrations and criticisms unnecessary. This is the fact that Buddhism has traditionally had two distinct levels of ethics and religious expectations - one for the world-involved layperson and one for the renunciate aspiring to spiritual perfection. Buddhist lay ethics and practices, *lokiyadhamma*, have always been more worldly, encompassing economic, political and other material concerns which would seem well-suited, perhaps with some relatively minor adjustments, for guiding activities related to modernisation and socio-economic development. Siddhi Butr-Indr summarises the attributes of the ideal Buddhist layperson, which are presented in the *suttas*, as being one who,

[38]Donald K. Swearer, *Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa and the Buddhist Reformation in Thailand*, pamphlet published by the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, Colombo Sri Lanka, 1982(?), p.5.

[39] This is how Pun chose to translate the name of his group, the "Khana Phöeyphrāe Withī Kān-damnōen Chīwit An Prasōet (คณะเผยแพร่วิธีการดำเนินชีวิตอันประเสริฐ), literally "Society for Propagating the Method for Leading One's Life Perfectly".

[40] **Pun** Congprasōet (ปุ่น จงประเสริฐ) (ed), *Wiwātha Rawāng Thān Phutthathāt Phikkhu Kap M.R.W. Khykrit Prāmōt Nai Rȳang Cit-wāng* ("วิวาทะระหว่าง ม.ร.ว. คึกฤทธิ์ ปราโมช กับท่านพุทธทาสภิกขุในเรื่องจิตว่าง" *A Debate Between M.R. Khukrit Pramot and The Reverend Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu on the Matter of Cit-wāng*), Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา), Samutprakan Thailand, 2518 (1975), p.24.

> seeks wealth by lawful and non-violent means, in so doing gets ease and enjoyment for himself, shares it with others and does meritorious deeds, utilises it without greed and craving, and is guiltless of offence, heedful of danger and alive to his highest value.[41]

Given that the roles of monk and layperson are institutionally compartmentalised and that *lokiyadhamma* has traditionally sanctioned active world-involvement the reasons for some lay Thai intellectuals' disenchantment with Buddhism and their criticisms of the *saṅgha* are not immediately apparent. The source of the dissatisfaction in fact lies in the changes which have occurred in many of the more highly educated and socially concerned Thais' view of the world and of their religious aspirations, changes which have been taking place apace with modernisation. The relatively small stratum of educated Thais - the teachers, university lecturers, government officials, writers, artists and students who have either studied abroad or under the Western-modelled Thai tertiary education system and who identify with the goal of just and equitable national development - is the social group whose values and outlook have come to differ most radically from the traditional Thai conceptions of life and religion. Contemporary university educated and critical, thinking Thais consider themselves part of the international intellectual community and as has already been noted accept the Western-derived criteria of theoretical criticism and argumentation and the methodological principles of science which underpin the technology and know-how being used for modernisation. And more importantly, like the British-educated Sinhalese elite in Ceylon, they also judge traditional and popular lay Buddhism by these same Western-derived rationalist and scientific standards, often rejecting or criticising it as being superstitious and unsubstantiated by the scriptures. For example, Pun Congprasöēt often spoke of modernist religious reforms as being like, "operating to remove the cancer of superstition from Buddhism"(T)[42] a cancer he defined as including among other things, belief in magic, spirit houses, magical bracelets and amulets, trances and spirit possession and conversing with celestial beings.

The divergence between popular Buddhism and the doctrinal religion ascribed to by many educated Thai Buddhists has been apprarent for some time. In 1947

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[41] **Butr-Indr**, p.39.

[42] **Pun** Congprasöēt (ed), *Tamrā Dū Phiksu* ("ตำราดูภิกษุ" *A Textbook For Observing Monks*), Samnak-nangsy̌ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.1.

one Araya Nikornthai[43] made the following observations in a newspaper article entitled, "Phutthasâsanâ Campen Samrap Khon Thai Rŷ" ("พุทธศาสนาจำเป็นสำหรับคนไทยหรือ" "Is Buddhism Necessary for Thais?"), a plea for modernisation in Thai Buddhism,

> If we had persisted in following the ways of our ancestors how could we have got the constitution?[44] The differences between the religious beliefs of our ancestors and of people today are thus so great that we can say there is a Buddhism for the people of the past and a Buddhism for contemporary people.(T)[45]

Van Esterik notes that in desiring to reform Buddhism in accordance with their modernist views progressive Thai intellectuals cut across all the traditional institutional divisions of Thai Buddhism, appropriating to themselves not only such formerly clerical aspects as meditation but even the monarch's traditional role as upholder of the religion,

> The reformation of Buddhism by laity is a modern movement. Educated and elite laity have taken up the role normally bestowed upon the king, to purify the religion and, at the same time to make it relevant to present day society, as they perceive it. Instead of restoring the monkhood, which many of them denigrate, they seek "salvation" in a religious involvement that will purify each and every individual in the state.[46]

Being lay yet adhering to a traditionally clerical, monastic form of Buddhism means that progressive Thai intellectuals face more moral and ideological tensions than either the monks, the general populace or the power elite of the aristocracy, military and large business interests. These tensions are manifested in their

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[43] Àraya Nikornthai (อารยะ นิกรไทย) is a nom-de-plume which literally means "the civilised Thai populace". This assumed name was obviously intended to imply that the views contained in the article are held by all "civilised" (read "modernistic") Thais.

[44] This is a reference to the 1932 revolution which abolished the absolute monarchy of King Prachâthipok (Rama VII) and established the then Siam as a constitutional monarchy.

[45] Àraya Nikornthai (อารยะ นิกรไทย), "Phutthasâsanâ Campen Samrap Khon Thai Rŷ" ("พุทธศาสนาจำเป็นสำหรับคนไทยหรือ" "Is Buddhism Necessary for Thais?"), cited in **Arun** Wêtchasuwan (อรุณ เวชสุวรรณ) in *Sûan Môk - Mŷang Chaiyâ Lae Phutthathât Phikkhu* ("สวนโมกข์ – เมืองไชยาและพุทธทาสภิกขุ" *Sûan Môk, Chaiya and Buddhadâsa Bhikkhu*), 3rd printing, Samnak-phim Phrâe Phithayâ สำนักพิมพ์ แพร่พิทยา), Bangkok, 2524 (1981), p.294.

N.b. The fact that this quote by Àraya Nikornthai is contained in a biography of Buddhadâsa suggests that the author was either a supporter of Buddhadâsa or someone who holds similar views. It is unlikely that Buddhadâsa himself was the author as he usually signs his name to his own works.

[46] John Laurier **Van Esterik**, *Cultural Interpretation of Canonical Paradox - Lay Meditation in a Central Thai Village*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University Microfilm International, Ann Arbor Michigan, 1977, p.172.

disenchantment with the traditional religion. In contrast to the religious conservatism of most other sections of Thai society those Thais who bring the critical insights of their Western-styled education to bear on the problems of contemporary Thai society and religion must deal with the full force of the ideological conflict generated by placing modernist material demands and expectations for social development on a system of religious doctrine which grew from a pre-modern social order and which sought an altogether other-worldly goal. For example, there is a pronounced tension between the ultimate religious goal of *nibbāna*, now appropriated by many lay Buddhist intellectuals as their private religious ideal, and the traditional Theravāda interpretation of *nibbāna* as a purified mental state obtainable only by years if not lifetimes of intense moral and meditative effort undertaken in seclusion away from everyday social interaction. This is only one of a number of fundamental tensions which result from educated laymen's and laywomen's rejection of the traditionally defined lay system of Buddhist belief and practice and their consequent attempts to hold to the clerical system of religious practice and doctrine, which has been exclusively monastic for over two millenia.

However, the traditional separation of lay Buddhism from the clerical form of the religion means that educated lay Buddhists face a practical dilemma in addition to the theoretical problem of developing a doctrinally pure religion by removing what are seen as non-Buddhist accretions. Underlying this practical dilemma is the historical restriction of *dhamma* or religious studies to the leisured scholar monks. But more fundamental is the problem that according to the clerical tradition now inclined towards by the educated laity a world-involved layperson is regarded as lacking the religious **authority** necessary to develop acceptable re-interpretations of Buddhism. While desiring to reform or purify Buddhism the critical lay Buddhist lacks the religious status needed to authorise any significant re-interpretations. Only the clergy possess such authority but as already noted the *saṅgha* is by and large conservative with few monks feeling any responsibility to adjust either the interpretation of the *dhamma* or their own practice of the *vinaya* to suit the modernist predilections of a critical intellectual minority.

The continuing acceptance of this traditional centralisation of religious authority in the hands of members of the *saṅgha* is reflected in the fact that not even the most radical lay Thai Buddhists have suggested that they appropriate full religious authority to themselves. Among all the calls for doctrinal purification and reforms of the *saṅgha* there are no calls for a Protestant-like reformation of Thai Buddhism. This reticence of the laity to seek to obtain explicit religious authority

for themselves is a consequence of the long-standing political support for the strongly orthopractic character of Buddhism, where the greatest religious status is ascribed to those who most strictly follow the ascetic codes of the *vinaya*, i.e. the renunciate monks. This officially recognised and sanctioned tradition of orthopraxy, which denies full religious authority to the laity, is not challenged by even the most radical of Buddhists because for the laity to appropriate the full religious authority of the clergy would be to undermine the traditional role of the monk and thus the institution of the *saṅgha*. And such action is seen, even by the most critical layperson, as a threat to Thai Buddhism itself. This reluctance to do anything which might be seen as undermining the *saṅgha*, such as an explicit lay assumption of religious authority, follows from the *saṅgha* being included as an inalienable part of one of the most central of all Buddhist articles of belief. This is the Buddha's pronouncement that all those who seek salvation from suffering should maintain faith, *saddhā*, in the three unimpeachable jewels, *tiratana*, of: the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *saṅgha*[47]. It is out of the question for a doctrinally strict lay Buddhist to breach such a central canonically recorded doctrine by arrogating to him or herself the spiritual authority invested in the *saṅgha* and vouchsafed by the Buddha's own recorded words.

What the critical Buddhist layperson, caught at the crossroads of a clerical ideology and worldly involvement, would therefore seem to require is a monk, preferably with a reputation for both scholarship and practical insight, to develop a new outlook upon Buddhism on their behalf. For as outlined above educated lay Buddhists face doctrinal and practical dilemmas which they as laypersons cannot resolve. I suggest that a key to understanding the significance of many of Buddhadāsa's doctrinal re-interpretations lies in realising that both his teachings and his personal history, as a renunciate monk, meet the pressing social and religious needs of that group of educated Thai Buddhists who desire a Buddhism which is consistent with their modernist view of the world and with their roles as agents of their country's socio-economic development. In explicating Buddhadāsa's work I will often return to this argument, that the central aspects of his re-interpretations of Buddhism, whatever their doctrinal authority or spiritual validity, can also be seen as fulfilling the needs of modernist Thais looking for a Buddhism consonant with their social aspirations for a modernised, developed Thailand.

It is true that as a monk Buddhadāsa is not directly affected by the practical dilemmas of critical lay Buddhists who are denied full religious authority, and so

[47]This pronouncement occurs in the *Dhammadinna Sutta*, *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, Vol.19/verses1625-1626/pp.404-405.

the innovativeness of his doctrinal re-interpretations cannot be regarded as having been directly determined by these tensions. However, as noted Buddhadāsa is by birth and rearing a member of the social group who now constitute his largest audience. While sections of Buddhadāsa's work can be seen as straightforward attempts to demythologise or rationalise Buddhist teachings other sections of his work are explicitly concerned with the social and political role of Buddhism in modern Thailand. This social aspect of Buddhadāsa's work clearly shows that he shares the concerns of his lay audience and that he does feel responsible to develop a modernist interpretation of the religion which is relevant and directed to resolving the dilemmas faced by lay Buddhists. Buddhadāsa thus sympathises with his lay supporters and is explicitly concerned to deal with their difficulties in his work. Consequently it must be acknowledged that Buddhadāsa's work is a response not only to intellectual modernist or rationalist trends but also to the religious and ideological dilemmas faced by the rising new bourgeois stratum of Thai society, of which Buddhadāsa is himself a member.

2.5 The Traditional Bases of Religious Authority in Theravāda Buddhism.

However, it is not only Buddhadāsa's ideas which are important to his lay audience. Buddhadāsa's **way of life** is also important in authorising and giving legitimacy to his radical views in the face of a generally antagonistic and conservative religious establishment. Buddhadāsa's strict ascetic life gives authority to his views, something of vital importance to the insecure new bourgeois which is seeking to find a legitimate and recognised place for itself and its views in modern Thailand.

In order to appreciate why the manner of Buddhadāsa's life and teaching as well as the theoretical content of his doctrinal re-interpretations are so important to modernist lay Buddhists it is first necessary to digress briefly to consider the traditionally accepted bases of religious authority in Theravāda Buddhism. Religious authority in Theravāda Buddhism is more than an institutionally recognised right to speak on and interpret matters of doctrine, although it does include that right. Because of the orthopractic emphasis of the religion and the absence of centralised censorial controls on interpretations of the Buddha's teachings, whether by laypeople or by monks, there is in effect a universal right to speak on matters of doctrine within certain legally and traditionally defined bounds. Rather, religious authority within Thai Buddhism denotes the right to be listened to and to be regarded as a person whose utterances or writings should be treated with due gravity and respect. Essentially religious authority in Thailand is equivalent to the institutionally

recognised standing of a **person**, rather than of his or her statements or arguments, within the official hierarchy of the Buddhist *saṅgha*.

However, the definition of religious authority on doctrinal matters has been ambiguous in Theravâda Buddhist history. This ambiguity arises from a conflict between, on the one hand, the predominant orthopractic concern with correct moral and meditative practice as the recognised basis of attaining the transcendent insight required for salvation and, on the other hand, the fact that expertise in doctrinal matters requires intellectual or theoretical expertise, a rational skill which is not of itself recognised as being capable of leading to the attainment of *nibbāna*. In Theravâda history there has been a long-standing dispute over whether scholarly knowledge of the scriptures, i.e. *dhamma*, or strict obedience to the codes of monastic practice, i.e. *vinaya*, should be accepted as the primary determinant of institutionally recognised religious authority. Rahula notes that the debate over whether learning or practice is more important dates back to ancient Ceylon. In the first century B.C. a dispute arose between Buddhist ascetics called *paṁsukūlikas*, "wearers of rags from a dust heap", and those monks who specialised as teachers of the doctrine, *dhammakathikas*. The dispute concerned whether the basis of the *sâsana*, the religion, lay in the strict asceticism of the *paṁsukūlikas* or in the scholarship of the *dhammakathikas*. Rahula observes that,

> Ultimately it was decided that learning was the basis of the *sâsana*, and not practice. The *paṁsukūlikas* were silenced and the *dhammakathikas* were victorious.[48]

Nevertheless the issue remained ambiguous, for as Rahula goes on to say this decision in fact ran contrary to,

> the original idea as found in the *Dhammapada*[49] that a person of realisation even though he has only a little learning is superior to one who has great learning but no realisation.[50]

"Realisation" here denotes transcendent insight gained through moral and meditative practice. The institutional decision in favour of the scholars and the teachers of the *dhamma* did not in fact abolish the groups of forest-dwelling and other ascetic monks, who continued their strict practices as before. Rather, it marked the origination of two distinct monkly vocations, between what is called the

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[48]Rahula, *A History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p.159.

[49]The *Dhammapada* is a popular section of the *Suttapiṭaka*, found in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.

[50]Rahula, ibid.

"vocation of books", *ganthādhura*, or the study and teaching of the *dhamma*, and the "vocation of meditation", *vipassanādhura*, or the single-minded reflection upon the truths of suffering, impermanence and non-essentiality. This vocational distinction is still preserved in Thailand today. While the majority of monks are urban or temple dwelling specialists on the teachings a highly respected minority called *dhūtaṅga* monks (Thai: thudong) lead the life of wandering ascetics much like the early *paṁsukūlikas* in ancient Ceylon. Speaking of the situation in Thailand Tambiah notes that,

> The recommended ideal is for monks to be *gramavasi* (residing in towns and villages and engaging themselves in educational and religious activities) rather than *vanavasi* (residing in the forest and engaged in meditation with no obligation to the laity).[51]

But Tambiah also comments that regarding forest-dwelling monks, "the laity are apt to consider them [forest monks] holy and to pursue them with gifts."[52] This indicates a significant degree of respect for and acknowledgement of the authority of these Buddhist anchorites. Thus in practice both scholarship, or rational skills, and strict ascetic practice, which it is assumed leads to the development of spiritual insight, continue to be recognised bases of religious authority. However, the strict relationship between these two criteria remains vague and not explicitly defined.

2.5.1 Buddhadāsa's Religious Authority.

Unlike most monks, whose standing or authority usually rests on a personal specialisation as either a temple-dwelling teacher or a wandering ascetic, Buddhadāsa in fact fulfils both of the traditional authority-conferring criteria. Buddhadāsa's double-sourced religious authority lies, firstly, in his being a renowned and capable scholar who is well-versed in the Buddhist scriptures and, secondly, in his extremely conservative and ascetic approach to Buddhist practice. In 1932 at the age of 26 he proclaimed that the only way to reach the truth of Buddhism was to literally follow the Buddha's own path of renouncing the world for the forest. Buddhadāsa decided to repenetrate to the heart of the Buddha's realisation by discarding the diversions of the *saṅgha* hierarchy and its associated ritualism and returning to the ascetic roots of the religion. For several years he lived as a solitary recluse in an abandoned temple in the jungle of Southern Thailand, a fact that for many Thai Buddhists endows him with a greater religious authority than purely scholarly

[51] S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand*, Cambridge at the University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p.67.

[52] ibid.

monks, who are not regarded as having so strong a practical insight into the truths of Buddhism. After this solitary phase, during which Buddhadāsa began to formulate his re-interpretations of doctrine, he also began to promote and publish his views and today is recognised as a learned teacher of Buddhist doctrine. However, he still retains his original wish to refind and re-express the fundamental truths of the religion by returning to its original source in ascetic practice,

> The Lord Buddha himself did not have an umbrella, shoes, mosquito nets and lots of additional kinds of things ... We call this [ascetic practice] the system of reviving or promoting the practice of *dhamma*.(T)[53]

As a monk Buddhadāsa is therefore in a strongly authoritative position and he has used this to develop a wide-ranging re-interpretation of Buddhist doctrine which parallels the ideological concerns and needs demands of the progressive lay Buddhists.

Buddhadāsa's popularity amongst modernist lay Thai Buddhists can thus be seen as resulting from his resolution of certain intellectual and practical religious problems facing that group, both in the authority of his person, which is founded upon both practice and scholarship, and in the innovative reformist character of his teachings. However, it is his reformist views rather than the details of his ascetic practice that draw the most praise and which are the object of this study. In the words of one lay supporter,

> Buddhadāsa has been called a reformer ... a reformer is someone astute in returning to the ancient teachers and in returning to the original teachings. Such a person is an opponent of teachings which have been so embellished as to lose the way, interpreting the original teachings so that they are in line with the changing society and with the new generation. A reformer communicates the culture and basic institutions of old by steadfastly keeping to their core and to *saccadhamma*[54], interpreting appropriately for the situations which actually arise in the new society.(T)[55]

The sources of Buddhadāsa's reformist work and of his break with the

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[53] **Phutthathāt**, *Thalāengkān Sūan Mōk 50 Pī* ("แถลงการณ์สวนโมกข์ 50 ปี"), pp.6-7.

[54] *Saccadhamma* denotes "the truth of the doctrine of *dhamma*" or "the true teachings".

[55] Frontispiece to *Thān Phutthathāt Nai Thatsana Khōrng Nak-wichākān* ("ท่านพุทธทาสในทัศนะของนักวิชาการ" *Buddhadāsa in the View of Academics*), published by **Khanakammakān Sāsanā Phya Kānphatanā** (คณะกรรมการศาสนาเพื่อการพัฒนา), no author given, Bangkok, 2525 (1982).

doctrinal conservatism which has historically characterised Thai Buddhism are complex. External political, economic and cultural influences from the West have provided a trigger which has activated the use of models provided by existing fundamentalist and reformist precedents within Buddhist history. These historical precedents have acted as bases for re-interpreting doctrines and views, an activity which Buddhadāsa has justified and authorised by a declared return to the original wisdom and insight of the Buddha. Western-derived criticisms of popular animist beliefs have also freed a latent rationalism lying within doctrinal Buddhism itself, whose development and application has acted as an indigenous source of innovation and reform. Furthermore, social conflicts and changes in the class structure of Thai society as a result of modernisation have given immediate sociological and political relevance to what superficially may simply be taken as abstract and theoretical issues of religious doctrine. The nascent Thai middle classes, like the entrenched conservative establishment, regard Buddhism as a vital institutional source of social and religious legitimacy. However, given that the interests and advancement of the new bourgeois are dependent upon socio-economic development and change, rather than upon maintenance of the **status quo**, they wish to see a new interpretation of Buddhist doctrine and practice which supports their interests rather than shoring up the position of the establishment. The "new Buddhism" they desire is precisely the rationalist, doctrinal and world-involved doctrine of Buddhadāsa. Buddhadāsa's work thus exists at a juncture of trends, of Buddhist fundamentalism, of the rationalisation of the religion due to the impact of Western notions, and of the need of Buddhadāsa's own social stratum of the educated Buddhist elite for an alternative Buddhist ideology to promote their interests within the Thai social order. All three forces are manifest in and often overdetermine Buddhadāsa's work, the specific details of his re-interpretations having sources in both theoretical and social influences. And in developing a complete understanding of Buddhadāsa's work it is consequently necessary to consider all of these factors.

CHAPTER 3

PHASA-KHON - PHASA-THAM: BUDDHADASA'S METHOD OF SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION.

The pivot of Buddhadāsa's re-interpretation of Theravāda doctrine is the notion of cit-wâng, "voided-mind" or "freed-mind", which is analysed in detail in Chapters Five and Six. Cit-wâng denotes a mind which is free from the disturbances of moral impurities, and which is consequently in a state of peace and equanimity, the foundation of *nibbāna* or salvation. For Buddhadāsa cit-wâng is the key to understanding the religious goal of Buddhism and is the basis of the practice to attain that goal both in individual life and in social life. But while Buddhadāsa's interpretation of cit-wâng is based upon notions found in the canonical literature, in particular the notion of *suññatā* or "voidness", it has not historically received much attention in Theravāda Buddhism. *Suññatā* or cit-wâng has in general been a secondary concept used to explicate more central notions such as *anattā*, non-self, and *anicca*, impermanence. Because of the peripheral character of the notions of *suññatā* and cit-wâng in the traditional readings of the *Tipiṭaka* in Thailand Buddhadāsa cannot justify his emphasis on them by referring to either the Thai tradition of scriptural interpretation or to the later commentary literature used to support that interpretative tradition. In placing cit-wâng at the centre of his presentation of Theravāda doctrine Buddhadāsa has in fact drawn heavily on Mahāyāna and Zen Buddhist teachings, which have traditionally been negelcted by Thailand's Theravāda monks. Indeed, in order to support his interpretation of Theravāda Buddhist doctrine Buddhadāsa has had to break radically with the doctrinal analyses and readings of the scriptures historically taught by the Thai *saṅgha*. This break with the Thai interpretative tradition has three main components.

Firstly, Buddhadāsa has developed an alternative hermeneutic or interpretative approach to the canonical scriptures, which has allowed him to argue that significantly more sections of the *Tipiṭaka* provide support for his views than uninformed readings appear to provide. He calls this interpretative theory phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham, "ordinary language - *dhamma* language", and it is this

theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham which is the analytical focus of this chapter. Secondly, Buddhadāsa reads the Theravāda scriptures selectively, rejecting as irrelevant to his re-interpretative enterprise the entire final section of the *Tipiṭaka*, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. In brief he rejects of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* because it is not written in the Buddha's words. Buddhadāsa accord's the Buddha's recorded discourses in the *Suttapiṭaka* the greatest authoritative standing because he regards those sermons and conversations as embodying the Buddha's original insights. Buddhadāsa's rejection of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is detailed in Chapter Four. Buddhadāsa also rejects the exegesis of the scriptures contained in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, which has been the most important commentary on the Pali canon in Theravāda countries since the fifth century of the Christian era. In criticising Buddhaghosa's system of exegesis Buddhadāsa opens the way for his altogether different interpretation of the scriptures based on the hermeneutic theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham. In addition Buddhadāsa reads selectively those sections of the canonical literature that he does retain. For example, in reading the *Suttapiṭaka* he concentrates on the *Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Aṅguttara*, and *Saṁyutta Nikāyas*, which contain the greatest number of direct quotes from the Buddha. On the other hand Buddhadāsa all but ignores the *Khuddaka Nikāya* of the *Suttapiṭaka*, a section of the scriptures which contains a larger proportion of the popular, "superstitious" Buddhist teachings that he rejects.

But in addition to his theory of scriptural interpretation and his critique of the canonical scriptures and commentaries there is a third important component to Buddhadāsa's re-interpretative enterprise, namely, his reliance upon the authority of reason and rational argumentation. That is, instead of seeking to justify his views solely in terms of scriptural precedents, a methodological approach he nevertheless follows in places, Buddhadāsa also argues for his central theory of cit-wāng from first principles. This is because, as noted above, in seeking to present what has been a relatively peripheral notion in the history of Theravāda Buddhism as **the** doctrinal core of the religion, a position that is without precedents, he must argue for his interpretation. Buddhadāsa's views must stand on the strength of arguments presented to support them because he is unable to rely on traditional sources of authority such as the commentaries, which present an interpretation of Buddhism that he rejects.

As indicated in the previous chapter Buddhadāsa's greater reliance upon reason has a precedent in the rationalist character of doctrinal Buddhism. Indeed Buddhadāsa's rationalism could just as well be described as a strict theoretical doctrinalism. His rationalism is characterised by a systematic effort to interpret the

entirety of Buddhist doctrine as the logical development of a number of key notions such as *anattà* and *anicca*, and he rejects as invalid any views which are inconsistent with the strict application of these fundamental notions. For example, while most Thai Buddhists are prepared to accept the existence of spirits and supernatural entities Buddhadàsa rejects these beliefs as being inconsistent with the doctrine of *anattà* or non-self, according to which there is no personal continuity after death. This doctrinalism, while based on the core of Buddhist teachings, also fits conveniently with the scientific rationalism which Buddhadàsa espouses. Both doctrinal Buddhism and science are based upon the notion of universal law, natural law in the case of science and *dhamma* or ethico-natural law in Buddhism.

In addition strict doctrinal Buddhism, while maintaining the reality of non-empirical conditions such as *nibbàna*, is not supernatural, denying that superhuman entities are capable of interfering in the operation of the universal laws of the cosmos. In doctrinal Buddhism salvation is attained by recognising and systematically utilising universal laws to alleviate and eventually extinguish human suffering. Given the assumptions of Buddhism, *nibbàna* or salvation is a logical result of following spiritual practices or rules. It is not the result of prayer or seeking the intervention of supernatural powers in one's life. There is therefore a structural parallelism between doctrinal Buddhism and scientific rationality which results from a common emphasis on law guided processes and logical consistency.

But even though the radical nature of his views forces Buddhadàsa to rely more heavily upon rational analysis in presenting his views he is still severely constrained by institutional factors. He must at all times be seen to be maintaining religious tradition and must avoid being regarded as in any sense harming the social or official role of Buddhism in Thailand. Buddhadàsa thus cannot afford to be seen as radical or innovative but must present all his views as being founded upon genuine Buddhist principles. But this very need to demonstrate his faithfulness to Buddhist principles, as opposed to conforming to established interpretations of the doctrine, introduces a far greater emphasis on rational argument into Buddhadàsa's work than has traditionally characterised doctrinal studies of Buddhism in Thailand.

The fact that Buddhadàsa ultimately does break from traditional notions and interpretations of doctrine is shown by his preparedness to accept non-Theravàda notions that he regards as having religious value into Theravàda Buddhism. Because he argues for his views in terms of what he sees as the principles of Buddhism and because he places his primary allegiance in those principles rather than in any specific text, commentary or traditionally accepted view, Buddhadàsa is free to draw on ideas which he regards as being theoretically compatible with his interpretation of what constitutes the fundamentals of Buddhist doctrine.

3.1 The Theory of Phāsā-khon - Phāsā-tham.

Buddhadāsa distinguishes two hermeneutic levels of the Buddha's words in the *Suttapiṭaka*, calling these two levels, phāsā-khon (ภาษาคน) or everyday language and phāsā-tham (ภาษาธรรม) or *dhamma* language[1]. He gives the following definitions,

> Everyday language is worldly language, the language of people who do not know *dhamma*. *Dhamma* language is the language spoken by people who have gained a deep insight into the truth, *dhamma*.[2]

Buddhadāsa says that phāsā-khon or everyday language,

> has as its foundation a meaning dependent upon matter (it does not fundamentally rest upon *dhamma*) and consequently speaks only about material things.(T)[3]

On the other hand phāsā-tham or *dhamma* language, "has to do with the mental world, with the intangible non-physical world."[4]

While Buddhadāsa speaks of two kinds of language in fact the distinguishing point between phāsā-khon and phāsā-tham is that they represent two different types of knowledge which underlay the original composition of the scriptures and which inform the reading of those scriptures today. According to Buddhadāsa the Buddha's recorded statements in the scriptures fall into two general categories, depending upon whether the Buddha himself was speaking in a mundane or literal way about everyday things, i.e. phāsā-khon, or whether his words were in fact expressing transcendent insights and so were founded on supramundane or spiritual knowledge, in which case they are phāsā-tham or *dhamma* language. The phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham theory is then concerned with the recognition of which sections of the scriptures are expressions of everyday language and which express spiritual insights in *dhamma* language. To be able to recognise this distinction, Buddhadāsa maintains, requires a degree of spiritual insight on the part of the reader, lacking which all the Buddha's statements will mistakenly be read with a

[1]Literally phāsā-khon means "the language of people" or "human language", that is, the everyday speech of human beings. "*Dhamma* language" is the direct translation of the term phāsā-tham.

[2]Buddhadāsa, *Two Kinds of Language*, trans. Ariyananda Bhikkhu, no publisher given, Bangkok, 1974, p.1.

[3]id., *Mai Khaucai Sāsanā Phror Mai Rū Phāsā-tham* ("ไม่เข้าใจศาสนาเพราะไม่รู้ภาษาธรรม" *Not Understanding Religion Because of Not Knowing Phāsā-tham*), Ongkān Fŷn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา), Samutprakan Thailand, no publication date given, p.1.

[4]id., *Two Kinds of Language*, p.3.

mundane awareness simply as phāsā-khon. This is because language itself, being a feature of the rational or discursive functioning of the mind, is incapable of adequately expressing transcendent knowledge. Such knowledge is only symbolically or metaphorically alluded to in language and is incapable of being explicated within the rational domain. But if the reader does not recognise that in such cases language is being used to allude to that which cannot in fact be linguistically expressed he or she will mistakenly concentrate on the literal or phāsā-khon sense of the terms, and misread the author's original intent.

Buddhadāsa claims that it is possible to read some *suttas* or sections of the scriptures in two ways with two different meanings, depending on the mode of knowing which informs the reader's act of interpreting. Should the reader's awareness be founded solely on sense-based experience of tangible things then the *sutta* will be read as expressing the meanings of phāsā-khon or everyday language. That is, the reader will take the referents of the *sutta* to be material objects or empirically knowable conditions. But if the reader is spiritually aware and knowledgeable of the intangible realm then the same *sutta*, if it was in fact composed as an expression of transcendent knowledge, may be read as expressing the meanings of phāsā-tham, *dhamma* language. The same linguistic expression may thus be taken as referring to abstract supramundane things or processes. Thus the two types of language in Buddhadāsa's theory do not refer to any objectively discernible quality of the grammar, syntax or vocabulary of the scriptures. Rather the theory is concerned with detailing the types of interpretative frameworks a reader may apply to religious texts, with the intention of permitting the original spiritual or mundane character of *suttas* to be recognised.

A phāsā-khon interpretation of a term is then simply its conventional or literal meaning while the same term's phāsā-tham rendering is its spiritual or symbolic sense. Buddhadāsa uses this distinction to argue that many of the traditional readings and interpretations of the Buddhist scriptures in Thailand remain at the literal or phāsā-khon level. He also argues that these traditional interpretations are wrong, or at least inaccurate, insofar as they do not take into account the transcendent phāsā-tham sense of terms or passages. In general, Buddhadāsa is opposed to literal or phāsā-khon interpretations of the scriptures, arguing that the true import of the Buddha's words is only found when their spiritual or metaphorical, i.e. phāsā-tham, significance is appreciated. He does not claim that every expression in the scriptures has both a phāsā-khon and a phāsā-tham reading. It is not the case that the entire body of the recorded words of the Buddha can be read as a consistent system solely at the literal level of phāsā-khon or at the

metaphorical level of phāsā-tham. There is only an overlap, and thus possible confusion over interpretation, at certain points. That is, in some places Buddhadāsa takes the Buddha's words as straightforwardly and unsymbolically referring only to the everyday or commonplace things, situations and feelings they seem to denote. He maintains that both hermeneutic levels need to be considered in order to accurately understand the Buddha's teachings, "not just either one of them alone."[5]

In his work Buddhadāsa places more emphasis on the notion of phāsā-tham, and those sections of the *Suttapiṭaka* that he regards as being expressed in *dhamma* language, than on phāsā-khon and those sections of the scriptures which can be read literally. This is because it is his re-interpretations of doctrine in terms of phāsā-tham which differ from the traditional views of Buddhist teachings and which therefore need to be discussed and justified. The parts of the scriptures which he regards as being written in phāsā-khon are not of great interest to Buddhadāsa because they are the sections where, by and large, he agrees with the traditional literal reading of the texts.

3.2 Historical Precedents of the Phāsā-khon - Phāsā-tham Theory.

Buddhadāsa's theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham has a precedent in well-established principles laid down for interpreting the Theravāda scriptures. Bond has analysed the post-canonical methodological text, the *Netti-Pakaraṇa*[6] as purporting that "right construing" of the Buddha's words is arrived at by the following procedure,

> These terms and phrasing [in question] must be placed beside the *sutta* compared with the *vinaya* and patterned after the essential nature of the *dhamma*.[7]

Here the terms *sutta*, *vinaya*, and *dhamma* have specific senses. Bond proposes that in the *Netti-Pakaraṇa sutta* refers to the doctrinal core of Buddhism, the four noble truths or *ariyasacca*; *vinaya* denotes the moral practice of overcoming lust, hate and delusion while *dhamma* refers to the theoretical elaboration of Buddhist doctrine represented by the theory of causation or

[5]ibid. p.3.

[6]The *Netti-Pakaraṇa* is attributed to Mahākaccāna, an immediate disciple of the Buddha. It is not regarded as canonical by the Sinhalese and is not part of the Thai *Tipiṭaka* but is included in the Burmese canon.

[7]George D. Bond, "The *Netti-Pakaraṇa*: A Theravāda Method of Interpretation", in Somaratna Balasooriya (ed), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, Gordon Fraser, London, 1980, p.20.

paticcasamuppāda. Buddhadāsa has explicitly referred to this principle of justification cited in the *Netti-Pakarana*, "The Buddha laid down a principle for testing: examine and measure against the *suttas* and compare with the *vinaya*."[8]

This general interpretative principle is based on advice given by the Buddha on his deathbed on how to deal with statements on the doctrine which are dubious or disputed. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* the Buddha says,

> Then you should study well those [disputed] paragraphs and words, and investigate whether they occur in the *sutta*, and compare them with the *vinaya*. If having investigated the *sutta* and compared with the *vinaya* they can neither [be found] in the *sutta* nor [found to be] comparable with the [teachings in the] *vinaya* then you should reach agreement on these points that they are certainly not the words of the Bhāgava[9], and that the *bhikkhu* in question [who made the disputed statement] has incorrectly remembered [the Buddha's teaching]. You should discard those statements completely.(T)[10]

The principle of interpretation laid down here is that disputed or dubious statements on the doctrine should be compared with the recorded words of the Buddha, the *sutta*, and with the ethical principles recorded in the *vinaya*, to gauge whether they are strictly accurate or, if not a strict restatement of the Buddha's words, at least in accord with Buddhist ethical principles. Bond says, however, that an additional interpretative principle is put forward in the *Netti-Pakarana*, namely, that interpretations of the doctrine should "be patterned after the essential nature of the *dhamma*". This is a more general principle, that a view or opinion should be theoretically consistent with the doctrinal basics of the religion, rather than a literal restatement of the Buddha's words as required in the above passage from the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.

It should be noted that the Buddha gave the above strict and literalist interpretative method at a time when Buddhism was an oral tradition. Before the Buddhist canon was written down several centuries after the Buddha's death a primary concern of monks was with faithfully remembering the Tathāgata's precise words. The Buddha's statement in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* is thus meant as an injunction to monks to adhere closely to the actual teachings of the Buddha which they had commited to memory. The *Netti-Pakarana*, which is definitely a post-canonical composition, represents a development of this principle into a form more

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[8]Buddhadāsa, *Buddha-dhamma For Students*, p.24.

[9]Bhāgava - "the blessed, auspicious one", i.e. the Buddha.

[10]*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol.10/v.113/p.102.

appropriate to a literate tradition in which the demands of simple memorisation have been lifted and true scholarship or textual analysis can be undertaken. The *Netti-Pakaraṇa's* addition of the principle that scriptural interpretations should be patterned after the *dhamma* amounts to a recognition that in a literate tradition faithfulness to the Buddha's teachings no longer necessitates a strictly literal adherence to his actual words but may also be based upon views which follow the **spirit** of the Buddha's teachings. This more liberal principle of interpretation is very close to Buddhadāsa's method of interpreting the scriptures.

Furthermore, Bond proposes that the central interpretative method put forward in the *Netti-Pakaraṇa*,

> not only requires the interpreter to elicit from a text the semantic essence of the *dhamma* (phrasing), but also to indicate how a text points to the goal of the *dhamma* [i.e. *nibbāna*].[11]

That is, according to Bond the *Netti-Pakaraṇa* proposes that the scriptures can be interpreted at two levels, at the level of understanding the semantics of statements and terms themselves, and at the level of understanding how those terms and statements point towards or are sugestive of *nibbāna*. These two levels closely parallel Buddhadāsa's distinction between phâsâ-khon as the literal sense of a term or statement and phâsâ-tham as the transcendent insight alluded to by what otherwise might be read as a quite ordinary expression. And just as Buddhadāsa proposes that it is possible for those lacking in spiritual insight to read the scriptures in terms of phâsâ-khon while missing their higher or phâsâ-tham import so too, Bond says,

> the *Netti* implies that every authentic text implicitly points to the *attha* [sense or meaning] of the Buddha's teachings, but unless an interpreter is aware of the guidelines this indication of the goal could be overlooked or misunderstood.[12]

The most important similarity between the method put forward in the *Netti-Pakaraṇa* and Buddhadāsa's interpretative theory then is, as Bond puts it, the proposition that,

> the interpreter must not only understand the words of the Buddha's teaching but must also grasp how they point to the aim of the *dhamma*.[13]

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[11] Bond, p.19.

[12] ibid. p.22.

[13] ibid.

Buddhadâsa aims to present the doctrines of Buddhism in a way that clearly reveals their relevance to contemporary life. In attempting to fulfil this aim by utilising the interpretative licence conferred by his notion of phāsā-tham or *dhamma* language, Buddhadâsa is in fact expressing the interpretative principle which the author of the *Netti-Pakaraṇa* implored all interpreters of the Buddha's words to adhere to. Namely, to go beyond the immediate sense or presentation of a term to appreciate its underlying spiritual import.

3.3 The Notions of Spiritual Depth and Contemporary Relevance in Buddhadâsa's work.

Buddhadâsa's notion of *dhamma* language as an insightful appreciation of the underlying spiritual sense of a term or statement is closely related to his concern to inject new relevance into Buddhism. He himself has said that he hopes his re-interpretations will enable Thai Buddhism to, "effect results that will satisfy today's students."(T)[14] By "students" Buddhadâsa here means educated Thais with a modernist and progressive outlook. Buddhadâsa regards his phāsā-tham interpretations as not only revealing the hidden truth of Buddhist teachings but as simultaneously demonstrating the contemporary relevance of those teachings to "today's students". That is, he regards returning to the original truth of the religion as equivalent to establishing the importance of the saving message of Buddhism in the modern world. This equation of truth or spiritual depth with contemporary relevance is seen by some of Buddhadâsa's critics as opportunistic, as seeking to justify a modern Buddhist social ideology by what is presented as a return to the original truth of the religion. Such claims are not without substance given the apparent preparedness of some of Buddhadâsa's lay followers to support his modernist interpretations for pragmatic political reasons rather than because his views are perceived as necessarily manifesting spiritual truth. For example, a biographer of Buddhadâsa gives the following quote as indicative of the views of those who support Buddhadâsa's work,

> If the religious officialdom does not effect a revolutionary renewal in Buddhism so that it becomes appropriate and relevant to the expectations of Thais of today's civilisation the disintegration of Buddhism will become more clearly manifest every day ... As for the state of mind of Thais with strong nationalist feelings, at this time they have already begun to be widely alert in religious matters. That is, they would be glad to accept every kind of religion or ideology so long as that religion or ideology helps promote the development of co-operation ... for suppressing the power of

[14]Cited by Chit Phibānthaēn, p.102.

other lands in our economic and political affairs.(T)[15]

However, Buddhadāsa himself has never expressed so pragmatic a preparedness to propose a particular view of Buddhism simply because of its social relevance rather than because of its fidelity to religious truth.

But whether Buddhadāsa's views on Buddhist doctrine are regarded as in fact representing the original teaching of the Buddha or as simply being a conveniently adjusted interpretation presented under the guise of conforming to Buddhism's original insights depends on what is regarded as the true core of the religion. Buddhadāsa's conservative critics take the historically and institutionally sanctioned interpretations of doctrine as the most reliable guidelines to the Buddha's actual message. As a consequence the fact that Buddhadāsa's views are in general at odds with the traditional presentations of the doctrine is regarded by these authors as discrediting his work.

However, Buddhadāsa himself believes that religious truth lies in faithfulness to doctrinal principles rather than to historical tradition as embodied in the institution of the *saṅgha*, which he regards as often maintaning erroneous and inconsistent interpretations of Buddhist teachings. Buddhadāsa assumes Buddhism to be a universal religion in the sense that its message of salvation from suffering is universally true and relevant to all people in all times and in all places. He then regards the criticisms of modernist, educated Thais that institutional Buddhism in Thailand is no longer relevant to contemporary life as indicating that the true meaning of the Buddha's message has been obscured. Buddhadāsa claims that the source of the obfuscation of the Buddha's universally relevant message of salvation lies in the influence of Brahmanical and animist beliefs, which have become associated with institutional Buddhism and which have distorted the original pristine character of the religion. It is these same Brahmanical and animist beliefs that Western-educated and Western-influenced Buddhists have rejected as irrational and unscientific. Buddhadāsa believes that when these accretions are removed and the doctrine is once again revealed in its original purity the contemporary relevance of that universal message will become clear and the problem identified by intellectual critics will have been resolved. At the same time Buddhism will have been cleansed of the irrational and supernaturalist elements which many educated Thais find unacceptable. Buddhadāsa's rationalist approach to interpreting Buddhist doctrine, justified by his interpretative theory of phāsā-tham, simultaneously brings Buddhism into conformity with a particular view of modern scientific rationality and with a

[15] Araya Nikornthai, pp.295-296.

doctrinalist view of the religion that seeks to make the teachings of Buddhism wholly consistent with its basic theoretical principles.

Buddhadāsa's return to religious first principles can be seen as a genuinely motivated attempt to "purify" Buddhism and to once again reveal its universal message of salvation. But at the same time his related interest in establishing Buddhism as a scientific and rational religion, if considered in isolation, can also be regarded as a pragmatic attempt to instil relevance into the religion by responding to changing public opinions and social trends. But given the complex set of cultural, theoretical, social and political influences underlying Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations it is not possible to present any single judgement on the status of his work. Buddhadāsa's work is not a "pure" phenomenon, whether purely a response to Buddhist principles or purely a pragmatic or political development. His work is a compound phenomenon which can only be expected to manifest its diverse sources. Consequently neither Buddhadāsa's own claims that he is in fact returning to the truth of Buddhism nor the counterclaims of his critics that his theory of phāsā-tham is merely a cover for pragmatic adjustments of doctrine to meet contemporary expectations can be ignored. Elements and sections of Buddhadāsa's work can be isolated and used to support both sets of claims.

3.4 Further Historical Precedents of the Phāsā-khon - Phāsā-tham Theory.

But quite apart from the question of how Buddhadāsa utilises his interpretative theory it must be acknowledged that there are a number of clear precedents in the Theravāda tradition for the theory of phāsā-tham itself. In addition to the methodology of the *Netti-Pakaraṇa* there is an even older precedent for the phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham distinction in the tradition that in giving discourses the Buddha varied the level of his instruction according to the ability of his audience to understand the spiritual truths revealed. This tradition provides justification for Buddhadāsa's claim that different sections of the *suttas* were given by the Buddha in different ways, whether as phāsā-khon or as phāsā-tham. This traditional view is expressed in verse form in the *Visuddhimagga*,

> By methods terse and long as need may be He taught the law, so that from beings' hearts, if they have wit to learn, the dark departs, melting in the good *dhamma's* brilliancy.[16]

The view that there are two levels to the Buddha's discourses is related to the

[16] *Visuddhimagga*, XV, 33.

traditionally recognised division between the two paths to salvation that the Buddha purportedly taught. That is, between the *lokiya* or mundane path for the layperson, which promotes well-being but does not end the process of rebirth, and the *lokuttara* or supramundane path for the renunciate, which leads directly to the cessation of rebirth and to liberation from suffering. The view that the Buddha spoke in different ways depending on the level of spiritual development of his audience is also related to the Buddha's pragmatic approach to knowledge discussed in Chapter Two, where it was noted that he regarded that which is beneficial as having priority over that which is strictly true. Weeraratne comments that the important term *sammà*, "correct" or "true" (as in the Buddha's injunctions to "right view", *sammàdiṭṭhi*, and "right action", *sammàkammanta*), has a different import depending on whether it is being used in relation to the *lokiya* or the *lokuttara* path. He proposes that at the *lokiya* level of practice,

> Right [*sammà*] does not necessarily mean true ... Right here seems to have a pragmatic meaning such as "useful", "beneficial" and "conducive to well-being and happiness" ... This is very clearly hinted at in the *Apaṇṇaka Sutta*[17] and in the *Apaṇṇaka Jàtaka*[18] where it is said that when there are two views [concerning the interpretation of the Buddha's teaching], one opposed to the other, regarding which one cannot come to a conclusion as to which of them is true and which is false, one should tentatively accept the view that would inspire action, resulting in one's well-being and happiness.[19]

Taking this view some passages in the scriptures have been interpreted as referring to the *lokiya* path where say "right view", *sammàdiṭṭhi*, does not mean actual insight into religious truth but an outlook with spiritually beneficial results which might ultimately be conducive to attaining enlightenment. On the other hand other passages in the scriptures have been taken as referring more directly to the *lokuttara* path. Buddhadàsa expresses a view similar to this in the following passage,

> At the basic level right view [*sammàdiṭṭhi*] is understanding which is correct in the respect that it effects beneficial development of this world in every way the worldlings want[20]. Right view of the middle level is

[17] *Apaṇṇaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikàya*, Vol.13/verses103-124/pp.80-103.

[18] *Apaṇṇaka Jàtaka, Khuddaka Nikàya*, Vol.27/verse1/p.1.

[19] W.G. Weeraratne, *Individual and Society in Buddhism*, Metro Printers Ltd, Colombo Sri Lanka, 1977, p.12.

[20] "Worlding" or *putthujana* denotes a person who is caught up in desires for objects and things in the material world.

understanding which is correct insofar as it effects beneficial development in worlds higher than those worldlings wish for, and which are called the "other world", the world beyond or the next world[21] and which are better than or different from this world. As for the high level of right view, that denotes understanding which is correct in the respect that it effects crossing over or transcendence of each and every world in all ways, which is called the attainment of *nibbāna* or *lokuttara* and which is interpreted as being beyond the world.(T)[22]

In addition to the tradition of the two levels of the Buddha's discourses the phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham distinction has a further, more systematically expressed theoretical precedent in the Buddhist theory of two truths. There is in Buddhist theory a recognised distinction between a conventional or everyday level of knowing, *sammatisacca*, and a form of knowing based more directly on underlying truth or reality, *paramatthasacca. Sammatisacca* or conventional truth is also called *vohārasacca*, truth according to speech or conventional wisdom. *Paramatthasacca* on the other hand is, as noted by Phra Rājavaramuni, an eminent scholar monk, "to recognise things according to what they [really] are and for the sake of the development of the highest benefit [i.e *nibbāna*]."(T)[23] To know things "as they really are" here denotes perceiving the objects in the world according to the fundamental principles of reality identified by the Buddha, i.e. as impermanent, *anicca*, and without essence, *anattā*.

In the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* these two modes of knowing are respectively related to two modes of expounding the *dhamma*. *Sammatisacca* or conventional truth is related to *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* or exposition of the doctrine in terms of persons or by personification, and *paramatthasacca* or absolute truth is related to *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* or exposition in terms of elements or concepts. To expound Buddhist doctrine in terms of elements, *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*, is to consistently present the teachings in terms of the doctrine of *anattā*, i.e. that there is no essential self, and that everything is composed of naturally occurring elements or aggregates, *khandhas*, combining and functioning in accord with natural laws or *dhamma*. To be consistent with the doctrine of *anattā* one must completely eschew speaking of individuals (Pali: *puggala*) or persons. Instead one must speak only of *khandhas*

[21] For Buddhadāsa "world" in phāsā-tham denotes a mental state and not a plane of existence.

[22] Phutthathāt, *Nipphān* ("นิพพาน" *Nibbāna*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2524 (1981), pp.136-137.

[23] (Phra) Rātchaworamunī ((พระ) ราชวรมุนี), *Phutthatham* ("พุทธธรรม" *Buddhadhamma*), Thammasathān Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.55.

acting in accord with given laws, such as the law of *kamma* or the general natural law called *dhamma*. What is often called the *Abhidhamma* Method in Theravāda is an attempt to express the entire body of Buddhist thought by faithfully following the doctrine of *anattā* or non-essentiality. The *Abhidhamma* Method is an attempt to expound Buddhist doctrine by referring only to aggregates of elements rather than to substances or things.

A consistent account eschewing references to people who suffer or attain liberation, talking only of aggregates of form, consciousness, volition, etc. is called *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*, where *dhamma* has the specific sense of an element or constitutive aggregate, *khandha*. As previously noted the term *dhamma* also denotes the doctrine or teaching of the Buddha which is in accord with the realised truths of the cosmic order, this cosmic order also being called *dhamma*. In this more general sense of the term *dhamma*, *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* denotes a true or faithful exposition of the doctrine based upon spiritual insight into *dhamma*. Thus like phāsā-tham *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* is a spiritually informed exposition of Buddhist doctrine, because it is based upon insight into the truth of *anattā* and is in accord with absolute truth, *paramatthasacca*.

On the other hand *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* is regarded as an inferior and inadequate exposition of the doctrine because it continues to refer to people and individuals as if they in fact have an essential self. *Puggalādhiṭṭhāna* accounts of Buddhist teaching are, like phāsā-khon, based on everyday awareness or conventional knowledge, *sammatisacca*, which is devoid of spiritual insight. While such *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* expositions may have value in encouraging moral practice among those who lack the spiritual insight to appreciate the core doctrines, and even though as noted above the Buddha himself recognised the need to vary the level of presenting the teachings according to the spiritual abilities of the audience, such expositions in terms of conventional conceptions and terms are strictly speaking false. And while in the instructional texts of the *Suttapiṭaka* such false but morally and spiritually beneficial accounts of the doctrine are sanctioned, it was the intention of the the authors of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* to present the doctrine in a way wholly consistent with the principle of *anattā*. That is they attempted to write the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* solely in terms of *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*.

In elaborating his theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham Buddhadāsa also maintains that there are two levels at which the principles of religion can be understood, the exoteric and the esoteric, which he in turn relates to his notions of phāsā-khon and phāsā-tham and to *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* and *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* respectively. Buddhadāsa defines "esoteric" in Thai as chaphor-khon

(เฉพาะคน), "person-specific" or "pertaining to an individual's understanding."(T)[24] He also equates the Thai word for person, khon (found in the terms phāsā-khon ,"everyday language", and chaphor-khon, "exoteric") with the Pali loan word bukkhon (บุคคล , Pali: *puggala*) denoting "individual", which is found in the term *puggalādhiṭṭhāna*. Given this equation it appears that Buddhadāsa regards his term phāsā-khon as a Thai version of the much older Pali term *puggalādhiṭṭhāna*.

Buddhadāsa also has the following to say regarding the transcendent or *lokuttara* awareness of absolute truth, *paramatthasacca*, which underpins his phāsā-tham interpretations of the scriptures,

> This [*paramatthasacca*] is held to be truly speaking in the way of *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*, and to reach to the end point of those matters [of doctrine] which ordinary people still cannot see.(T)[25]

Given that the Thai word tham (as found in phāsā-tham) is the Thai equivalent of the Pali term *dhamma*, and also given that he equates the terms phāsā-khon and *puggalādhiṭṭhāna*, it appears that Buddhadāsa similarly regards his term phāsā-tham as a contemporary Thai rendering of the Pali term *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*. And Buddhadāsa acknowledges that the concepts of *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* and *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* found in the *Abhidhamma* literature are a source of his notions of phāsā-khon and phāsā-tham when he says of phāsā-khon, "This is called speaking in the way of *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* [i.e. *sammatisacca*], for those who cannot work out deep things."(T)[26]

However, while Buddhadāsa presents phāsā-khon and phāsā-tham as being linguistically and conceptually related to *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* and *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* there is in fact an important difference between the two sets of terms. Traditionally the *Suttapiṭaka* as a whole has been called *vohāradesanā*, "the teaching (presented in terms) of conventional speech", because it is composed predominantly of conversations or *vohāra* expressed in conventional speech. That is, the entire *Suttapiṭaka* has traditionally been categorised as *puggalādhiṭṭhāna*. On the other hand the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* has been called *paramatthadesanā*, "the teaching

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[24] Phutthathāt, *Tekitcakam* ("เตกิจฉกรรม" *Tekiccakamma*), Thammathān Mūlanithi (ธรรมทานมูลนิธิ), Chaiyā Thailand, 2519 (1976), p.297.

[25] ibid. p.290.

[26] id., *Osāretapphatham* ("โอสาเรตัพพธรรม" *Osāretabbadhamma*), Thammathān Mūlanithi (ธรรมทานมูลนิธิ), Chaiya Thailand, 2525 (1982), p.55.

(presented in terms) of ultimate truth", because its doctrinal tracts are in the main expressed in terms of the constitutive elements of existence. That is, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is an exposition in terms of *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*. The theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham, however, breaks with this convention. Buddhadāsa maintains that many of the Buddha's statements in the *Suttapiṭaka*, in accord with the convention that the Buddha addressed different audiences in qualitatively different ways, should be read as *paramatthadesanā*, i.e. as phāsā-tham. He says that to regard all the discourses recorded in the *Suttapiṭaka* simply as conventional speech or *vohāradesanā* and to interpret them as all being *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* or phāsā-khon, as has traditionally been the case, is to miss their real spiritual significance. That is, Buddhadāsa transfers the domain of applicability of the notion of *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* from its traditional referent of the philosophical analyses of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* to the discourses and discussions of the *Suttapiṭaka*, which have historically been regarded as being presented solely in terms of *puggalādhiṭṭhāna*. Thus while being derived from the notion of *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*, Buddhadāsa's notion of phāsā-tham has both a different emphasis and a different referent from its parental notion. Similarly, while the notion of phāsā-khon is derived from that of *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* Buddhadāsa's term also has a different emphasis and a different referent. Instead of being a generic term for the direct speech recorded in the *Suttapiṭaka*, *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* is used to denote an inadequate and uninformed reading of that direct speech.

3.5 Difficulties With the Theory of Phāsā-khon - Phāsā-tham.

There is a difficulty, however, in the derivation of the notions of phāsā-khon and phāsā-tham. For while Buddhadāsa wishes to use these notions to develop his re-interpretation of the doctrine contained in the *Suttapiṭaka* the two terms' respective parental notions of *sammatisacca* and *paramatthasacca* and of *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* and *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* are not found in the *Suttapiṭaka* but first appear in the later *Abhidhammapiṭaka*[27], whose authority Buddhadāsa by and large rejects. In fact the distinction between absolute and relative truth defined above is only explicitly developed in the later commentaries, which Buddhadāsa considers even less authoritative than the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* itself. Buddhadāsa's views on the canonicity and authority of the Theravāda scriptures and commentaries are

[27]The term *sammatisacca* first occurs in the *Kathāvathu* of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, Vol.37/verse1062/p.338. The first occurrence of the term *paramattha* is in the same place, Vol.37/verses1-190/pp.1-83. The terms *puggalādhiṭṭhāna desanā* (*desanā*: teaching, instruction, exposition) and *dhammādhiṭṭhāna desanā* are not found in the *Tipiṭaka*, first occurring in a commentary on the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, the *Paṭisambhidhāmagga Aṭṭhakathā*.

discussed in detail in Chapter Four. However, it is important to note here that Buddhadāsa rejects the authority of the literature which he himself has stated is the source of the crucial hermeneutic theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham. His motivation in rejecting the *Abhidhamma* literature is to cleanse Buddhism of the superstitious and non-scientific cosmological material associated with it in Thailand and to avoid what he regards as the *Abhidhammapiṭaka's* excessive analytical detail. The motivation behind setting up the phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham theory is similarly to develop a method of interpreting the key scriptures of the *Suttapiṭaka* in a way that is scientific and non-superstitious. However, these two prongs of Buddhadāsa's re-interpretation of Theravāda doctrine, the rejection of the *Abhidhamma* and the positing of the theory of phāsā-tham, are in fact in conflict, with the rejection of the *Abhidhamma* undermining the scriptural basis of his hermeneutic theory.

However, as discussed above the notions of *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* and *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* found in the *Abhidhamma* literature are not the only sources of the theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham. Both the interpretative method put forward in the *Netti-Pakaraṇa* and the generally recognised tradition that the Buddha varied his discourses to suit the level of understanding of his audience also provide a firm basis for Buddhadāsa's theory within the Theravāda tradition. Nevertheless, it is still the case that Buddhadāsa explicitly cites *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* and *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* as the respective sources of his notions of phāsā-khon and phāsā-tham, and it is also the case that he rejects the authority of the *Abhidhamma*, literature which is the canonical source of those notions. While Buddhadāsa does not discuss his justifications of the phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham theory and his rejection of the *Abhidhamma* in the same texts this does not lessen the logical contradiction, a contradiction which he neither acknowledges nor deals with.

However, another Thai scholar monk also interested in developing modernist and relevant interpretations of Buddhist theory, Phra Rājavaramunī, has provided a possible resolution of the above contradiction in his reference work on Theravāda doctrine, *"Phutthatham"* ("พุทธธรรม")(T)[28]. While Phra Rājavaramunī is not explicitly concerned with Buddhadāsa's work or with the theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham[29] large sections of his book *Phutthatham* are directed to an analysis and justification of interpretations of the scriptures which correspond closely to

[28]See footnote 23 above. In Thai Phra Rājavaramunī's name is pronounced Phra Rātchaworamunī, and the bibliographical details of his works are listed under this name in the Thai language bibliography.

[29]In a private correspondence Phra Rājavaramunī has indicated to the author that he has read little of Buddhadāsa's work. Nevertheless he has also indicated that he does share many of Buddhadāsa's views.

Buddhadāsa's own views. Even though Buddhadāsa and Rājavaramunī have worked independently they share common views about the need to rid Thai Buddhism of animist and Brahmanical influences and of the need to re-interpret and re-present Theravāda teachings in a way that demonstrates their relevance to modern life. These common views have in several places independently led the two scholar monks to similar interpretative positions. Like Buddhadāsa Rājavaramunī places the greatest emphasis on the Buddha's own recorded words in the *Suttapiṭaka* as the source of doctrinal authority. Wherever possible he attempts to trace the origins of his interpretations of doctrine back to precise statements in the *Suttapiṭaka* rather than justifying his views by referring to one or other later commentary on the scriptures. Because of the similarity of Rājavaramunī's ideas to Buddhadāsa's views and because of the detailed and scholarly nature of his research I will refer to his work several times in the following chapters where it is of use in clarifying difficulties and ambiguities in Buddhadāsa's work.

In *Phutthatham* Rājavaramunī provides a detailed discussion on the origins of the *sammatisacca - paramatthasacca* distinction(T)[30], which as noted above is one precedent of the phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham theory. Rājavaramunī observes that the immediate source of this distinction is a comment made by a nun or *bhikkhunī* named Vajirā[31] in the *Vajirā Sutta*, who is quoted as condemning the conventional approach to understanding reality which is ignorant of the turth of *anattā* or non-self,

> This is Māra [delusion]! How can you have this clinging-informed thought that it [a human being] is an entity? Inasmuch as it is only a pile of *saṅkhāra* (compounded thing) no entity at all can be found. Just as when the necessary components are assembled together it is said that there is a "cart", so when all the *khandha* are present it is [conventionally] assumed that there is an entity.(T)[32]

Rājavaramunī adds that the *sammati - paramattha* distinction developed in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is in fact founded on the Buddha's advice to,

> recognise the use of language as a medium of meaning without being

[30]Phra Rātchaworamunī, *Phutthatham* ("พุทธธรรม"), p.55.

[31]The distinction between *sammatisacca* and *paramatthasacca* made in the *Kathāvatthu* of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* (see footnote 27 above) is based on an analysis of the comments made by the nun Vajirā.

[32]*Vajirā Sutta*, *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, Vol.15/verse554/p.167.

attached to the [conventional] assumptions as a slave of language.(T)[33]

He supports this view by citing passages such as the following from the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*, where the Buddha says,

> These are worldly appellations, worldly expressions, worldly usages and worldly designations that the Tathāgata uses in speaking but is not attached to.(T)[34]

Here Rājavaramunī is saying that the conceptual distinction of *sammatisacca* and *paramatthasacca*, which underpins both Buddhadāsa's phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham theory and the interpretative distinction of *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* and *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*, has its actual source in the Buddha's own recorded words found in the *Suttapiṭaka*. That is, Rājavaramunī's account circumvents the difficulty caused by Buddhadāsa's denial of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and related commentaries by tracing the sources of the distinction back to the *Suttapiṭaka* whose authority Buddhadāsa does recognise. However, Buddhadāsa himself does not detail this source of his notions in the *Suttapiṭaka* and so it still remains the case that within the body of his own writings there remains a contradiction between his assertion of the theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham and the denial of the authority of that theory's immediate scriptural source in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*.

3.6 Difficulties in Applying the Interpretative Theory of Phāsā-tham.

In addition to the theoretical difficulties associated with the scriptural sources of the phāsā-tham theory there are also practical difficulties in applying Buddhadāsa's theory of scriptural interpretation. Firstly, Buddhadāsa provides no explicit principle to indicate which parts of the *Suttapiṭaka* should be read in terms of either phāsā-khon or phāsā-tham. His theory is consequently particularly susceptible to attack, for without a clearly expressed criterion of how the two types of interpretation should be applied disputes over the respective phāsā-khon or phāsā-tham character of particular *suttas* cannot easily be resolved. And secondly, Buddhadāsa does not provide a theoretical criterion for judging the accuracy of any particular interpretation of a *sutta* which he claims is the true phāsā-tham rendering of that *sutta*. This means that it is difficult for Buddhadāsa to prove that in re-interpreting the Pali scriptures he is not simply following his own whim or twisting the original text to suit his own purposes, as has been claimed by some of his

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[33](Phra) **Rātchaworamunī**, *Phutthatham* ("พุทธธรรม"), p.56.

[34]*Poṭṭhapāda Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol.9/verse312/p.281.

critics[35]. This is not to say that Buddhadāsa's interpretations are in fact wrong or twisted but that he provides no criterion which might allow others to independently decide the accuracy or inaccuracy of his renderings of the scriptures. That is, he does not provide a theoretical criterion which would allow an independent observer to determine from an analysis of the text or scriptures in question whether that text should be read as phāsā-tham and, if it is to be read as phāsā-tham, whether the *dhamma* language interpretation he gives to that text is in fact correct.

But while Buddhadāsa does not present any explicit criteria for the application of his interpretative theory a close reading of his works does reveal the operation of some implicit criteria. One of these criteria is sociological, in that Buddhadāsa bases judgements of the inaccuracy of traditional readings of the scriptures and of the accuracy of his phāsā-tham readings on the social and religious effects of those respective interpretations. This criterion is related to Buddhadāsa's ecumenical interests for, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine, harmony between religions is a major plank of Buddhadāsa's proposal for a better world, seeing as he traces social problems to weaknesses in or conflicts between religions. He thereby regards ending social problems which hinder improvements in human well-being as fundamentally a religious matter, saying that,

> The true objective of the founders of all religions with regard to the completion or perfection of what is most useful and needful for humanity is not being achieved, because the followers of the respective religions interpret the language of *dhamma* wrongly, having preserved wrong interpretations and preached wrongly to such an extent that the world has been facing turmoils and problems created by the conflicts among religions.[36]

Thus for Buddhadāsa the key to religious harmony is that each religion's doctrines should be interpreted correctly according to phāsā-tham, and because of what he sees as historical accretions to and misinterpretations of original religious teachings he warns that, "We should be extremely careful with [religious] interpretations of a rigidly traditional nature."[37] To promote mutual understanding and agreement concerning the correct rendering of each religion's doctrines Buddhadāsa calls for "enlightened flexibility as regarding interpreting."[38] Concretely this "enlightened flexibility" means that,

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[35]See Chapter Nine

[36]Buddhadāsa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, no translator given, 2nd edn, Sublime Life Mission, Bangkok, 1977, p.8.

[37]ibid. p.15.

[38]ibid.

> We should maintain that if an interpretation of any word in any religion leads to disharmony and does not positively further the welfare of the many, then such an interpretation is to be regarded as wrong; that is, against the will of God, or as the working of Satan or Māra[39].[40]

Here Buddhadāsa is restating the epistemological criterion of "moral benefit" put forward by the Buddha which was discussed in Chapter One. That is, he proposes that the criterion for judging the accuracy of a phāsā-tham interpretation is ethical. A term or *sutta* should be subjected to a phāsā-tham re-interpretation if its current or traditional interpretation does not produce social and religious harmony. And a phāsā-tham rendering is correct if it then permits or promotes universal welfare and inter-religious harmony.

This sociological criterion for the application of phāsā-tham interpretations demonstrates that Buddhadāsa's theory is not based solely in Theravāda doctrine although, as has already been discussed, it is closely related to the tradition of Theravāda thought. Rather, Buddhadāsa's hermeneutic theory incorporates his perception of the social role and importance of Buddhism in Thailand, for the sociological criterion for applying phāsā-tham interpretations of the scriptures is based upon judgements concerning the proper social impact of particular interpretations of religious texts and doctrines. This sociological criterion for the application of phāsā-tham interpretations does not deal with the character of the texts in dispute but is based on extra-textual judgements of the beneficial or deleterious impact of scriptural interpretations. For Buddhadāsa phāsā-tham interpretations are valid and true if and because they promote moral and religious well-being and ultimately assist in the attainment of *nibbāna* or salvation from suffering. As already noted this criterion is in accord with the practical or ethical epistemological emphasis of Theravāda Buddhism, where a point or theory is judged as "true" if it has practical benefit in assisting the attainment of salvation, not because that point or theory is true **per se**.

This practical and ethical epistemological criterion is, however, founded upon implicit theoretical principles. It is based firstly on the assumption that *nibbāna* is an actual and true condition. Furthermore, the ethical criterion of truth assumes that any activity which promotes the attainment of *nibbāna* must of necessity be guided by knowledge which either reflects that ultimate truth or participates in it to such an extent that it is capable of ultimately effecting its realisation. That is,

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[39] Māra is regarded as a demon who proferred the last great temptation to the Buddha-to-be before he attained enlightenment. This was the temptation to rule the world rather than rule the passions and attain *nibbāna*.

[40] **Buddhadāsa**, *Christianity and Buddhism*, p.15.

only action based upon principles which are in fact in accord with the ultimate truth of *nibbāna* are in practice capable of leading to the understanding of that truth. Because the ethical goal of Buddhist spiritual practice is a state of wisdom or absolute knowledge epistemology and practice are thereby inter-related. For this reason Buddhadāsa's practical or sociological criterion for the application of his phāsā-tham theory must be regarded as in fact being based upon sound Buddhist epistemological criteria. However, he himself has not explicitly detailed these matters and has, as a consequence, left his interpretative theory somewhat in a state of theoretical confusion.

3.7 Criticisms of the Phāsā-tham Theory.

The confusions associated with Buddhadāsa's presentation of the theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham make it particularly susceptible to attack, and indeed there are vehement critics of Buddhadāsa's two language theory. However, the attacks of these critics in general reveal either a misunderstanding of what the theory actually proposes or the criticism is more political than theoretical, which perhaps is to be expected given the practical and social emphasis of the phāsā-tham theory. In general it is the political and social implications of Buddhadāsa's views on the language of the Buddhist scriptures which are criticised, not the views themselves nor the means by which he arrives at them. The polemical character and general theoretical inadequacy of many of the criticisms raised against the phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham distinction in fact demonstrates that in fundamentally reforming Buddhist teachings in Thailand Buddhadāsa provides not just an intellectual but an ideological challenge to traditionalist and conservative Thai Buddhists, who respond with political and ideological rather than strictly theoretical attacks on his work.

For example, former Prime Minister Khukrit Pramot[41] criticises not only the phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham distinction but also says that the overall style of Buddhadāsa's language in his works and sermons is confusing for the average Thai. In one public debate with Khukrit Buddhadāsa remarked that, "The more one

[41] Khukrit Pramot is probably the most famous contemporary Thai politician, being the leader of the Social Action Party, one of the major co-alition partners in recent Thai Governments under Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanon. Khukrit was himself Prime Minister in 1973 and again in 1975. He is also a well-known novelist and owner of a major Bangkok daily newspaper. His intellectual as opposed to political stature can be gauged by the fact that he has publicly debated Buddhadāsa on TV and radio on issues of Buddhist doctrine and practice.

studies Buddhism the less one understands it."(T)[42] Buddhadâsa has a fondness for paradox and irony, being much influenced by the Zen school of Buddhism. And as in Zen Buddhadâsa often likes using language provocatively with the object of stimulating his audience to reconsider their customary views. In the above quote Buddhadâsa is emphasising that purely theoretical studies of Buddhism not only do not lead to correct spiritual understanding but the convolutions of an intellect caught at the level of phâsâ-khon may actually prevent insight into Buddhist truths. However, in reply to Buddhadâsa's above statement Khukrit quipped, "You should go and teach the Japanese, you speak like a Zen Buddhist."(T)[43] As a politician Khukrit appears to have in mind the accessibility of Buddhism to the Thai masses when he criticises the purported difficulty of Buddhadâsa's style.

However, there have been some more specific theoretical criticisms of Buddhadâsa's interpretative theory, such as the following by Winay Siwakun, an economist and political scientist working in the Department of the Budget[44]. Winay argues that,

> In regard to explaining the *dhamma* understandably, how will we speak unless we use phâsâ-khon for talking and explaining so as obtain knowledge and understanding of *dhamma*?(T)[45]

Here Winay has in mind the traditional notion of religious language in Thailand, which he mistakenly thinks is what Buddhadâsa means by phâsâ-tham.

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[42]Cited in Pun Congprasöet (ed), *Wiwâtha Rawâng M.R.W. Khykrit Prâmôt Kap Thân Phutthathât Phikkhu*, *Nai*, *Rŷang* *Cit-wâng* ("วิวาทะระหว่าง ม.ร.ว. คึกฤทธิ์ ปราโมช กับท่านพุทธทาสภิกขุ"), p.29.

[43]ibid.

[44]Winay Siwakun (วินัย ศิวกุล) is a trained economist working in the Department of the Budget. He teaches *Abhidhamma* at the Abhidhamma Foundation (Aphitham Mûlanithi - อภิธรรมมูลนิธิ) at Wat Phô in Bangkok. In particular he teaches about the relation between the Brahmanical aspects of Thai Buddhism and Abhidhamma. He is also head of the Ongkân Phithak Phra Phutthasâsanâ (องค์การพิทักษ์พุทธศาสนา) or The Society for the Protection of Buddhism, a conservative, traditionalist organisation.

[45] Winay Siwakun (วินัย ศิวกุล), "Phâsâ Phutthathât" ("ภาษาพุทธทาส" "Buddhadâsa's Language") in Anan Sênâkhan (ed), *Khamsôrn Dîarathî* ("คำสอนเดียรถีย์" *Heretical Teachings*), Ongkân Phithak Phutthasâsanâ Aphitham Mûlanithi (องค์การพิทักษ์พุทธศาสนา อภิธรรมมูลนิธิ), Bangkok, 2522 (1979), p.104.

Historically the language of Buddhism in Thailand has not been the vernacular but the ancient language of Pali, which is unintelligible to the uneducated. Winay asks how can Buddhism be understood if Buddhadâsa intends using such a remote and unintelligible language. But Winay has not only misunderstood what Buddhadāsa means by phāsā-tham, namely, a spiritually insightful reading of the scriptures and **not** a special scholarly religious language, he also fails to understand what is meant by phāsā-khon. He takes phāsā-khon as meaning literally, "human speech", with the implication of speaking in an understandable and reasonable way. While in common usage phāsā-khon has the positive import of being clear, down to earth and sensible, for Buddhadāsa it has the negative import of being an inadequate and limited appreciation of the Buddha's teaching. This inversion of the term's usual import in Thai is a deliberate linguistic ploy by Buddhadāsa to emphasise that what most people take to be a sound and reasonable interpretation of the scriptures is, from a spiritual perspective, quite unsound. Winay asks how deep things can be understood without using the clear language of phāsā-khon. It is Buddhadāsa's point, however, that what Winay purports to be clear and reasonable language is based upon a material rather than spiritual mode of knowing. Consequently a phāsā-khon analysis is incapable of appreciating the actual import of the *dhamma* simply because it has not penetrated to the epistemological realm of *dhamma*, remaining in the "sensibleness" of mundane awareness.

Buddhadāsa's point is that without spiritual insight into *dhamma* no amount of explaining, no matter how clear and reasonable, will ever succeed in instilling in the listener an actual appreciation of the Buddha's teaching. In Buddhadāsa's view phāsā-khon, or language taken literally as expressing the conventionally accepted wisdom of the average person, no matter how astute or perspicuous, forever fails to grasp the truths of the *dhamma*.

Nevertheless, in his criticisms of Buddhadāsa's theory Winay invokes a powerful ally in his emphasis on ease of understanding in accounts of Buddhism, namely the present Thai king, Phumiphon Adunyadet or Rama IX (1947 -). In a 1965 address to the Khanakammakān Sūn Khonkhwā Thāng Phutthasāsanā (คณะกรรมการศูนยคนควาทางพุทธศาสนา), or the Committee of the Centre for Buddhist Research, at Wat Saket Bangkok, King Phumiphon emphasised that despite the progress of science Buddhism retained its traditional importance, as indicated by the number of Europeans and Americans interested in it. The King then suggested that foreigners' interest in Buddhism should be facilitated and that,

Buddhism should be taught so that it can be easily understood, by means of language everyone can listen to without having to spend a long time.(T)[46]

This speech is referred to by another critic of Buddhadāsa's, the former monk, Phra Chayānanthō Phikkhu, or Anan Sēnākhan[47] in a book called *"Khamsōrn Dīarathī"* ("คำสอนเดียรถีย์") - *Heretical Teachings*), a text which is directed solely at condemning Buddhadāsa and his ideas. The clear implication of this book is that Buddhadāsa's teachings, by not fitting with the King's expressed wish for Buddhism to be expounded simply and straightforwardly, not only show disobedience to the monarch but also subvert the propagation of Buddhism to foreigners, which the King and many other Thai Buddhists regard as an important cultural activity.

However, these criticisms by Winay and Anan are not directed at the actual theory of phāsā-tham, but rather criticise the political implications of Buddhadāsa's work and not his theoretical work itself. This failure to deal with theoretical issues and the corresponding concentration on politics is a systematic characteristic of many of the criticisms directed against Buddhadāsa's interpretations. This indicates that the crucial point of disagreement between Buddhadāsa and his critics is not in fact strictly theoretical or doctrinal but is more a question of fundamentally differing appreciations of the nature of Buddhism in modern Thailand. The response of Anan Sēnākhan, Winay Siwakun and similar conservative critics of Buddhadāsa to socio-economic modernisation and development has been to resist change in what they perceive as key elements of Thai culture and identity, symbolised in the traditional teaching and practice of Buddhism. For the conservatives change is regarded negatively as a threat, but for liberal Buddhists like Buddhadāsa the changes brought about by modernisation are seen as challenges, to be met by judicious adjustment of existing ideas and outlooks to the new circumstances. As will be discussed in a later chapters these two polarised responses to change are also associated with polarised political stances in contemporary Thai secular life.

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[46] Cited by Anan Sēnākhan (อนันต์ เสนาขันธ์) in *Khamsōrn Dīrathī* ("คำสอนเดียรถีย์" *Heretical Teachings*), Ongkān Phithak Phutthasāsanā Aphitham Mūlanithi (องค์การพิทักษ์พุทธศาสนา อภิธรรมมูลนิธิ), Bangkok, 2522 (1979) p.23.

[47] Anan Sēnākhan (clerical name Phra Chayānthō Phikkhu) was formerly a policeman in the Division of Crime Suppression and was active in an anti-corruption campaign within the police force. However, his criticisms of high-ranking officers and politicians forced him to become a monk for reasons of personal safety in 1975 after a number of threats were made against him. While a monk he became a strong supporter of the Abhidhamma Foundation at Wat Phō or Wat Phrachētuphon, and maintained his critical penchant by attacking progressive monks like Buddhadāsa whom he regarded as undermining Buddhist traditions. He disrobed in early 1983 in order to participate in the campaign for the general election but was arrested in April that year on the charge of *lese majeste* after a controversial public address on the monarchy. He has been convicted of that charge and is now serving two three year prison terms.

3.8 Doctrinal Re-interpretations Based on Phāsā-tham Readings of the Buddhist Scriptures.

While it is important to appreciate the problems underlying Buddhadāsa's phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham theory and the criticisms that it has received it is equally important to consider its place in his overall system of thought, as the basis for a re-interpretation of the entire body of Theravāda teachings and scriptures. I will now turn to consider an example of how Buddhadāsa in fact uses his hermeneutic theory.

In the Pali scriptures the Buddha and his disciples often refer to celestial beings and to demons and the various levels of heavens and hells inhabited by such beings. Traditionally other worlds and super-human and sub-human beings have been regarded as real in Buddhism, respectively representing the heights and depths a human may either rise or sink to in subsequent lives as a result of the outworking of their good or bad deeds. Celestial beings or *devatā*, heavens and hells are all taken as having real existences by Buddhaghosa in his interpretative text, the *Visuddhimagga*. Speaking of the supernatural powers attained by concentration meditation and the attainment of *jhānas* or trance states Buddhaghosa says that with the supernormal power of clairaudience one may hear, "right up to the Brahma world."[48], that is, the heavenly domain inhabited by the god Brahma and his retinue. Elsewhere he says that because of a strong desire for heavenly bliss one may, by the effect of the *kamma* created by such a desire, be reborn in the Brahma world[49]. Buddhaghosa supports his interpretation with quotes from the Buddha's own scriptural pronouncements on the benefits of attaining *jhānas*,

> Where do they [meditators] re-appear after developing the first *jhāna* limitedly? They re-appear in the company of the deities of Brahma's retinue.[50]

However, Buddhadāsa does not interpret such references to the "deities of Brahma's retinue" as being actual celestial beings. He says such a view is a limited phāsā-khon reading and instead defines *devatā* (Thai: thēwadā) in phāsā-tham as,

[48]Visuddhimagga, XIII, 6.

[49]ibid. VII, 7.

[50]*Vibhaṅga Sutta*, cited at Visuddhimagga, XI, 123.

"A person free of suffering, who is beautiful, lives in ease and is glorious."(T)[51] He adds,

> If in this human world there are some people who need not work, be anxious or bear heavy burdens but who can continually relax, play and be at ease then according to the above definition they can be called thēwadā. Moreover, if they obtain this status of ease for a few hours then they are thēwadā for those hours. Outside that period they are humans, or may even fall lower than that to become hellish beings. That is, for a few hours they may burn with worries and unease like beings in hell. When they work at tiring duties they are human. But in the hours they are sensually satisfied they are thēwadā.(T)[52]

As for the nature of the abodes of these thēwadā and hellish beings Buddhadāsa says that,

> Heaven is in one's breast, hell is in one's mind, *nibbāna* exists in the human mind. Hence what is meant by the term "world" exists in the human mind.(T)[53]

Talking specifically of the various grades of hell described in the Pali canon Buddhadāsa maintains that their interpretation as "woeful states" of mind, *apāya*, "co-incides in meaning and purpose with what the Buddha taught."[54], while the belief that they represent actual realms of being, "should be recognised as superstition."[55]

There is a common pattern across all Buddhadāsa's phāsā-tham re-interpretations of concepts which reveals a further implicit criterion underlying the application of the theory. Notions which in the *Visuddhimagga* and in popular interpretations of scriptures refer to actually existing supramundane or submundane realms and beings are reduced to psychological states or conditions. That is, in Buddhadāsa's phāsā-tham readings the traditional Buddhist cosmology is collapsed and brought within the range of the life and mind of the individual. Heaven or *sugati* in phāsā-tham is not a realm of happy rebirth but the state of mind of a

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[51]**Phutthathāt**, *Baramatham* ("บรมธรรม" *Paramadhamma*), Samnak-phim Sukhaphāp-cai (สำนักพิมพ์ สุขภาพใจ , Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.4.

[52]ibid. pp.4-5.

[53]**Phutthathāt**, *Kharāwāt Tham* ("ฆราวาสธรรม" *The Layperson's Dhamma*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.111.

[54]**Buddhadāsa**, *Buddha-dhamma For Students*, p.61.

[55]ibid.

happy person. Similarly a thèwadā is anyone who is "in heaven", in the popular sense of someone alive here on earth who is overjoyed or pleasantly satisfied.

Taken as a whole Buddhadāsa's phāsā-tham re-interpretations represent a systematic demythologisation of the Buddhist scriptures - whereby cosmological realms become psychological states and deities and demons are interpreted as individuals experiencing those respective states. Whenever a concept or term is traditionally interpreted in a way which is at odds with what can be called a modernist or rational scientific world view (i.e. that phenomena should be interpreted and explained empirically) then that term or concept is demythologised and is subjected to a phāsā-tham re-interpretation. While neither traditional Buddhist doctrine nor Buddhadāsa's work can be called scientific, Buddhadāsa does follow the spirit if not the letter of science. He eschews metaphysical interpretations of the doctrine and attempts to bring all the significant notions of Buddhist thought within the experiential ambit of the human mind.

This demythologisation, however, does appear to be at odds with sections of the scriptures which unequivocably refer to supernatural states and beings. The commonness of the Buddha's unqualified scriptural references to heavens, hells, deities and demons does give the strong impression that he himself believed in the metaphysical rather than simply psychological reality of such realms and beings. For example, it is difficult to interpret the following passages from the *Puggala* and *Cittaṇāyī Suttas* as referring to anything other than an actual hell and an actual heaven,

> If at this time the person [who has a mind turbid with *kilesa*] should die they would go to *naraka* [hell] because of their turbid mind ... All beings inevitably go to *dugati* [hell] because of that mental turbidity.(T)[56]

> If at this time this person [who has a mind bright and clear of *kilesa*] should die they would go to *sugati* [heaven] because of their clear mind ... All beings inevitably go to *sugati* because of that mental clarity.(T)[57]

However, Buddhadāsa's demythologisation of the Theravāda scriptures does obtain some support from the fact that the authority of the traditional system of scriptural exegesis taken from the *Visuddhimagga*, in which heaven and hell are regarded as real, is in fact based solely on tradition. There is no literature supporting the interpretative position taken in the *Visuddhimagga* because historically it has never been questioned in Thailand. Because heaven and hell have

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[56] *Puggala Sutta, Khuddaka Nikāya*, Vol.25/verse198/p.171.

[57] *Cittaṇāyī Sutta, Khuddaka Nikāya*, Vol.25/verse199/p.172.

traditionally been regarded as referring to actual supernatural conditions there has been no need to justify the literal reading of these and similar terms in the scriptures. This means that the interpretative system represented by the *Visuddhimagga* and related commentaries is only as strong as the regard and reverence in which that text and its interpretative tradition has customarily been held. Should the regard for that interpretative tradition falter then, in the absence of any explicitly argued justification for reading the scriptures literally, the basis of views and interpretations hallowed by that tradition would be substantially weakened. And by desiring that Buddhist doctrine be consistent with a rational scientific standard which has no place for the supernatural Buddhadâsa does indeed strongly question this traditional interpretative system.

The theoretical weakness and superficiality of the criticisms of the theory of phâsâ-tham made by Buddhadâsa's opponents demonstrates the lack of a theoretical basis for the traditionally accepted exegetical system. Those criticisms which are not directed at the political implications of Buddhadâsa's theory amount to simply statements of faith and *ad hominems*. In countering Buddhadâsa Anan Sênâkhan says,

> There really is a hell. It denotes every kind of being which must be born in the realm of suffering called hell ... beings having wholesome *kamma* are born in heaven.(T)[58]

And he accuses Buddhadâsa of, "explaining [the doctrine] like a mentally backward person."(T)[59]

In the absence of reasoned arguments for accepting the traditional Theravâda exegetical system any competing system of interpretation need not have so strong a theoretical foundation as might be expected. This point is brought out clearly by a follower of Buddhadâsa in a book on interpreting religious symbolism, i.e. phâsâ-tham,

> Since there exists no simple set of rules for the deciphering of religious allegories, each individual is more or less at liberty to propose whichever interpretation strikes him as the most reasonable. Whether he then manages to convince others that his view is correct depends on how well he can put his case and defend it against the attacks of critics.[60]

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[58] Anan Sênâkhan, *Khamsôrn Dìarathì* ("คำสอนเดียรถีย์", p.43.

[59] ibid.

[60] (Bhikkhu) Ariyananda, *Psychology and Religious Symbolism*, Sublime Life Mission, Bangkok, no publication date given, p.10.

Yet it must also be noted that Buddhadāsa does not in fact completely deny the cosmological reality of heaven and hell. He says,

> True enough, the heaven and hell of everyday language are realms *outside* - though don't ask me where - and they are attained after death. But the heaven and hell of *dhamma* language are to be found in the mind and may be attained anytime depending on one's mental makeup.(T)[61]

To be precise Buddhadāsa does not deny the traditional supernatural interpretations of doctrine but rather renders them irrelevant for the purpose which he takes to be the goal of Buddhism. That is, they are irrelevant to the attainment of *nibbāna* in this life. For as Buddhadāsa so often insists, "*nibbāna* must be something we can have in this life."(T)[62] He maintains that,

> Buddhism exists in order to allow everyone to live in the world victoriously, we needn't flee the world.(T)[63]

> As for that which is called *dhamma* or *sāsana* [religion], it exists in order to be the refuge of the people of the world. I don't want good people to discard the world but I want people to live in the world beneficially and without suffering.(T)[64]

Buddhadāsa defines Buddhism as a religious system which is concerned only with this life and while not denying the existence of an after-life in heaven or hell he places them outside the focus of concern of the religion. This means that from a phāsā-tham standpoint all the references to an after-life in the Buddhist scriptures must be interpreted as symbols of some condition or process in this life here on earth now. Buddhadāsa proposes, "The *dhamma* of the Lord Buddha does not talk about the period after death in the coffin as something important."(T)[65], justifying

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[61]Phutthathāt, "Upasak Hāeng Kānphoēyphrāē Tham" ("อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม" "Obstacles to Propagating Dhamma"), in Pun Congprasōet (ed), *Arai Thūk Arai Phit* ("อะไรถูกอะไรผิด" *What is Correct and What is Wrong*), Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา), Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.61.

[62]ibid. p.56.

[63]id., *Kharāwāt Tham* ("ฆราวาสธรรม"), p.138.

[64]Phutthathāt, *Khamsōrn Phū-būat* ("คำสอนผู้บวช" *Teachings for the Ordained*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2524 (1981), p.18.

[65]id., "Upasak Hāeng Kānphoēyphrāē Tham" ("อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม"), P.56.

this disinterest in the after-life by saying that, "If we rectify and correct this life then without doubt the next life will be rectified accordingly."(T)[66]

From a purely theoretical perspective the denial of the significance yet non-denial of the reality of supernatural phenomena might seem an unnecessary complication. If after all phāsā-tham interpretations do not deny the metaphysical reality of phāsā-khon or literalist views on heaven, deities and so forth but rather amount to a shift of emphasis one is left wondering what need there was to propound an altogether new hermeneutic of the scriptures. However, we should look to the ideological significance of phāsā-tham when seeking to understand the emphasis Buddhadāsa places on it. Ideologically one of the functions of Buddhadāsa's re-interpreted system of Buddhism is to endow the material world and human activities in this world with religiously sanctioned value. This sanctification of the mundane is effected by an integration of mundane activities and aspirations into the effort to attain spiritual salvation. As will be discussed in Chapter Six the notion of work, defined as integrating spiritual and material effort, is of central importance to Buddhadāsa's overall system. This shift, to view the material world as a positive domain of human activity and aspirations, is radically opposed to the traditional clerical view of the world as a retarding and almost inherently evil influence. The traditional scriptural view of life in the world, as a householder, is made clear in the following quote from the *Dīgha Nikāya*,

> Full of hindrances is the household life, a path for the dust of passion. Free as the air is the life of him who has renounced all worldly things. How difficult it is for the man who lives at home to live the holy life [*brahmacariya*] in all its fullness, in all its purity, in all its bright perfection.[67]

The attitude among many monks in Thailand today is little different. The biographer of the famous monk Acān Mun recounts that at an early point in his life the sage,

> came to realise that the life of the householder is the conglomeration of all kinds of suffering, being like an immense thicketed forest where lurk all kinds of dangers, whereas the chaste life [*brahmacariya*], supported by the efforts of renunciation, would serve to carry him through that dangerous land.[68]

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[66]id., *Kharāwāt Tham* ("ฆราวาสธรรม"), p.138.

[67]Pali Text Society, *Dīgha Nikāya*, II, 41.

[68](Venerable Phra Acharn Maha) Boowa Nyanasampanno, *The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatta Thera - Meditation Master*, trans. Siri Buddhasuk, Wat Pa Barn Tard, Udorn Thani Thailand, 1982, p.4.

The denial and opposition implicit in the theory of phāsā-tham is not directed solely at supernatural and other "unscientific" views but also against the world-negating outlook inherent in the traditional *lokuttara* standpoint. The proposition that there are two levels at which the Buddhist scriptures can be understood is thus fundamental to Buddhadāsa's attempt to make activity in the material world a positive part of the soteriological effort to end suffering, and contributes to the ideological significance of Buddhadāsa's thought and to his popularity among progressive Buddhists.

In fact phāsā-tham interpretations are not in fundamental opposition to all unscientific and supernaturalist views, but rather to a view of the soteriological activity of Buddhism which denigrates the social world. This indicates that the deeper function of Buddhadāsa's theory, over and above the demythologisation of the Buddhist scriptures, is the establishment of the material or social world as a domain with religious importance. It is because science values the material world, as the source and object of human knowledge and as the domain for the finding of human well-being, that Buddhadāsa so values it and uses phāsā-tham as a method to effect a rationalist demythologisation of Buddhism. But where supernatural beliefs do not devalue the material world Buddhadāsa does not appear to be concerned to either criticise or demythologise them. Buddhadāsa tends to criticise only those supernatural views which place more value on activities with a more other-worldly than this-worldly orientation. Some other magico-superstitious parts of Thai Buddhism are left untouched by him. For example, Buddhadāsa's view of money in the following passage, implying the transfer of merit via a material object, is distinctly magical and "unscientific" yet he provides no apology. Money is after all an essentially mundane phenomenon hardly in need of being reified or brought down from heaven,

> But what is certain is that according to the laws of nature money which has been obtained from good actions is "good money", and if money has been obtained from evil actions it is "bad money". "Good money" makes its owner an even better person. If "good money" is used to buy food to nourish the body one's body will benefit, if used to support one's wife she will be a good wife ... If the money is used to perform merit one will receive in return merit which is pure. Even after death one will still be sorely missed by everyone. Directly the opposite is the case for money which has been received from evil actions. That is, it makes its owner an even worse person. If used to buy food to nourish the body one's mind and body will both deteriorate. And if used to support one's children they will follow one in evil and vileness ... After death people will revile all one's

family line.(T)[69]

3.9 Conclusion.

The phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham theory of interpreting the Buddhist scriptures is not without theoretical difficulties, most notably caused by Buddhadāsa's denial of the validity of the very scriptures which provide some of the theoretical foundations for his interpretations and by his failure to provide an explicit criterion for the application of the theory. However, the theory of phāsā-tham does follow the spirit of Theravāda Buddhist teachings and does have significant precedents both in the canonical scriptures and in the commentary literature. Leaving aside the question of the precise historical and scriptural precedents for Buddhadāsa's theory of phāsā-tham it is also the case that his interpretative theory is a consistent development of basic doctrinal principles. That is, given the assumption that Buddhism contains a universally true and relevant message, and the recognition that the religion is no longer seen in this way an interpretative effort which again demonstrates the vitality of the original message of salvation must have in fact penetrated to and incorporated that basic insight.

But in judging Buddhadāsa's work it is also important to note that independently of the theoretical status of the theory phāsā-tham has a broader social and ideological significance in Thailand. This is due to its use in the demythologisation of Buddhist doctrine and the related conferring of religious value on activity in the social world. Despite its limitations and failings the theory of phāsā-tham - phāsā-khon must be recognised as a positive attempt to develop a new system for interpreting the *Tipiṭaka*, and in this chapter I have concentrated on how Buddhadāsa has set up his theory by detailing its connections with doctrinal precedents and by revealing the implicit ideological role of the theory. However, Buddhadāsa does not only champion his new hermeneutic by buttressing it with supporting arguments. He also undermines the doctrinal credibility of his critics, which does not amount to a specific defence of the phāsā-tham theory but is rather an attempt to discredit those who attack it. This subversive approach is manifested in Buddhadāsa's denial that the scriptures emphasised by his major opponents, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and its commentaries, are authoritative sources of Buddhist doctrine, and it is these critical claims which are considered in the next chapter.

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[69]**Phutthathāt,** *Thamma Prāp Phī Nai Tua Khārātchakān Lae Nak-kān-myang* ("ธรรมะปราบผีในตัวข้าราชการและนักการเมือง" *Dhamma Eradicates Ghosts in Public Servants and Politicians*), Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา), Samutprakan Thailand, no publication date given, pp.16-17.

CHAPTER 4

BUDDHADASA'S CRITICISMS OF THE ABHIDHAMMAPIṬAKA AND VISUDDHIMAGGA.

Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations of Buddhist doctrine are based not only on his novel hermeneutic approach to the canonical literature, i.e. the theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham, but also include a highly selective and critical reading of the Buddhist canon, the *Tipiṭaka*, and of the commentary literature. He rejects as either unnecessary or inaccurate large sections of both the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and Buddhaghosa's authoritative commentary work, the *Visuddhimagga*. Buddhadāsa undertakes this radical critique of the Theravāda scriptures and commentary literature as part of his general attempt to eradicate supernaturalist beliefs from Thai Buddhism and to refocus the religion on the immediacy of human life here and now. In addition to detailing his critical approaches to the Theravāda scriptures in this chapter I also detail Buddhadāsa's criticisms of the traditional Buddhist belief in rebirth. For Buddhadāsa regards the traditional Buddhist concern with *kamma* and rebirth, which he sees as being most strongly supported by *Visuddhimagga* and traditional interpretations of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, promoting supernaturalism and disinterest in life here and now.

4.1 The *Abhidhammapiṭaka*.

The *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, the third major division of the Theravāda canon after the *Vinayapiṭaka* and the *Suttapiṭaka*, is a set of seven complex theoretical texts which systematically present the teachings outlined in the *Suttapiṭaka* in accordance with the basic truths of impermanence, *anicca*, and non-self, *anattā*. The intention of the authors of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* was to represent the entirety of Buddhist teachings, as detailed in the recorded words of the Buddha in the *Suttapiṭaka*, as a consistent theoretical development of the doctrines of *anicca* and *anattā*. The *Abhidhamma* literature consequently eschews describing the objects of perceptual and cognitive experience as entities or *attā*, that is, as individuals. Instead, in accord with the doctrine that there are no individuals or essential selves, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* refers to the objects of experience only in terms of elements and shifting relational states of compounding between those elements.

The *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is a radical development of the non-self doctrine, which is interpreted as meaning that there is no essential unity to perceived or cognised objects and that there is no essential continuity between what is perceived or cognised at subsequent moments in time. While relations of contiguity and association are regarded as existing between the objects of experience at successive moments in time, the transformations in such objects are explained solely in terms of varying relations between diverse naturally existing elements and not as the variable expressions of any underlying entity, soul, spirit or essence. The *Abhidhammapiṭaka* thus develops a radical critique of everyday assumptions about the nature of the self and the world. And given that it was written over two thousand years ago in the context of a predominating belief in a soul or *attà* (Sanskrit: *àtman*) in Hindu dominated ancient India the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* must be regarded as one of the most astounding intellectual creations of the ancient world.

However, the analyses of the *Abhidhamma* were not developed solely as an intellectual exercise. As Nâṇamoli Bhikkhu, an *Abhidhamma* scholar, observes, the purpose behind its composition was,

> to furnish additional techniques for getting rid of unjustified assumptions that favour clinging and so obstruct the attainment of the extinction of clinging.[1]

In particular, as noted by Mrs Rhys Davids,

> The object of the profound analysis known as *Abhidhamma*, is to show generally that such a state of consciousness [of selfhood] is no simple modification of a mind-stuff, and, above all, that there is no soul or ego which is apart from the states of consciousness; but that each seemingly simple state is in reality a highly complex compound; constantly changing and giving rise to new combinations.[2]

That is, the analyses of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* were developed as spiritual aids for the purposes of overcoming delusion and developing the liberative insight into reality which is necessary for the attainment of salvation. By analysing the minutiae of experience solely as transitory relations of elements the authors of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* hoped to assist the Buddhist aspirant give up his or her delusional belief in the substantial nature of the objects of experience. The ending of the deluded belief in a self and the development of insight are regarded as leading

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[1] Nāṇamoli Bhikkhu, Introduction to his English translation of the *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa, 4th edn, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy Sri Lanka, 1979, p.xxvii.

[2] (Mrs) Rhys-Davids (ed), *Compendium of Philosophy - Translation of the Abhidhammattha-Sangaha*, Pali Text Society, London, 1972, p.8.

to a cessation of emotional craving and attachment to the objects of experience. This is because craving is regarded as resulting from the deluded belief that there is an "object" which can be possessed and a "self" which can possess.

4.2 Buddhadāsa's Criticisms of the *Abhidhamma* in Thailand.

Despite the unquestionable canonicity of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* Buddhadāsa is highly critical of the emphasis placed on this final section of the Buddhist canon in Thailand, and he claims that Thai Buddhism would in fact be better off without its complex theoretical details. Buddhadāsa regards the theoretical complexity of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as being unnecessary and even potentially misleading. He translates the prefix *abhi* as meaning "extreme" (ying - ยิ่ง) or "excessive" (kôên - เกิน), calling the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* an "excessive part" or "superfluous part" (sūan-kôên - ส่วนเกิน)(T)[3] of the scriptures and arguing that, "It is part of the *dhamma* [i.e. scriptures on the doctrine] which is not directly or immediately related to the extinction of suffering."(T)[4] By this Buddhadāsa means that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* represents an intellectual or theoretical system which exists apart from or only as an adjunct to the meditative practice which is the only true source of liberative insight. He regards the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as unnecessary for the purpose of attaining Buddhist salvation,

> On some occasions the Lord Buddha mentioned [in the *Suttapiṭaka*] the words *abhidhamma* and *abhivinaya*. These denote the parts of the *dhamma* which are excessive or the parts which provide too deep an explanation, beyond what is necessary for a person to know or to have in order to attain *nibbāna*.(T)[5]

But Buddhadāsa's interpretation of the term *abhidhamma* here is problematic. The term *abhidhamma* itself is rare in the *Suttapiṭaka*, the part of the canon containing the Buddha's discourses and the section of the scriptures which Buddhadāsa accepts as the true source of authoritative interpretations of Buddhist doctrine. Where the term *abhidhamma* does occur in the *Suttapiṭaka* it has a special sense, and does not specifically denote either the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* or the "*Abhidhamma method*", because the final section of the Theravāda canon was the last to be compiled, postdating the compilation of the discursive sections of the *Suttapiṭaka* by at least a couple of centuries. Suchîp Punyânuphâp, compiler of *The*

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[3]**Phutthathât**, "Upasak Hǎeng Kânphôeyphrǎe Tham" (อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม p.82.

[4]ibid.

[5]ibid. pp.82-83.

Tipitaka for the Common Man (*Phra-Traipidok Samrap Prachāchon* - "พระไตรปิฎกสำหรับประชาชน")[6] observes that when the term *abhidhamma* occurs in the *Kinti Sutta*[7] of the *Suttapitaka* it denotes, "the highly distinguished *dhamma*"(T)[8]. In particular it denotes the *bodhipakkhiyadhamma* or the thirty seven qualities regarded as contributing to enlightenment[9]. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* these thirty seven qualities are also collectively called the *abhiññādesitadhamma*[10], a term which denotes a higher practice of *dhamma* beyond the basics of Buddhist ethics. The difficulty in interpreting the nuances of these terms *abhidhamma* and *abhiññādesitadhamma*, which both denote a "higher" or "distinguished" *dhamma*, is that in Pali the notion "distinguished", *visesita*, can, as in English, denote both "excellent" or "superior" as well as simply "having many distinctions" or "having many parts". Noting this ambiguity, Buddhadāsa maintains that the prefix *abhi* in the term *abhidhamma* may mean either "great" or "excessive", depending on the context. He also acknowledges that depending on who uses it and how the *Abhidhammapitaka* is approached it may either be of "great" use or be "excessive" and a hindrance to spiritual practice. Buddhadāsa admits that when used by the right person in the right way the *Abhidhammapitaka* may be of benefit in spiritual practice, saying that it may,

> be either beneficial or non-beneficial, it can cause confusion or not cause confusion because it contains both that which is real or true and that which is excessive and unnecessary.(T)[11]

He concedes that the study of the *Abhidhammapitaka* is appropriate for those with penetrating understanding who wish to undertake an intellectual study of Buddhist principles. But he also claims that for the ordinary person the

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[6]Suchīp Punyānuphāp (สุชีพ ปุญญานุภาพ), *Phra-traipidok Samrap Prachāchon* - ("พระไตรปิฎกสำหรับประชาชน" *The Tipitaka for the Common Man*), Mahāmakut Rātchawithayālay (มหามกุฏราชวิทยาลัย, Bangkok, 2525 (1982).

[7]*Kinti Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, Vol.14/verses42-50/pp.31-36.

[8]Suchīp Punyānuphāp, p.461n.

[9]The thirty seven *bodhipakkhiyadhamma* are: the 4 *satipatthāna*, the 4 *sammappathāna*, the 4 *itthipāda*, the 5 *indriya*, the 5 *bala*, the 7 *bojjhanga*, and the 8 *magga*.

[10]Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya, Vol.10/verse107/p.99.

[11]Phutthathāt, *Aphitham Khȳ Arai* ("อภิธรรมคืออะไร *What is Abhidhamma?*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2517 (1974), p.9.

Abhidhamma is both excessive and a spiritual hindrance. Buddhadāsa defines what he calls the true *Abhidhamma* or "great *dhamma*" as *suññatā* or voidness, which he calls, "the *Abhidhamma* [i.e. "great *dhamma*"] which does not go by the name of *Abhidhamma*."(T)[12]. This notion of *suññatā*, in particular as interpreted in the Thai notion of cit-wāng, is central to Buddhadāsa's interpretation of Buddhist practice and is discussed in detail in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Buddhadāsa further defines what he means by *abhidhamma* by first drawing a distinction between what he terms philosophy and science,

> Buddhism as such cannot be a philosophy, it is a science. It is of a kind with material science but it is a mental science or a science of *nāmadhamma* [mentality].(T)[13]

Here Buddhadāsa takes "philosophy" as denoting theoretical or intellectual speculation while "science" is described as knowledge that is both definite and immediate. Utilising his interpretative theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham Buddhadāsa says that for those who "do not know [spiritual truth]", i.e. who interpret the scriptures at the level of phāsā-khon or everyday language, the term *abhidhamma* simply denotes a speculative system of thought such as is found in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. But for those who "know" or who read the canon at the level of phāsā-tham the term *abhidhamma* denotes "scientific knowledge" of absolute truth or *paramasacca*, which he defines as *anattā* or *suññatā*, or in Thai khwām-wāng (ความว่าง) - "voidness". That is, for Buddhadāsa *abhidhamma* does not denote a certain text or theoretical doctrine but rather the existential condition of knowledge of *anattā* or the "voidness of self" attained through meditative insight.

Nevertheless, Buddhadāsa concludes that in the final analysis the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* should be regarded as "superfluous" or "excessive" rather than as "great". This is because in his opinion it is not necessary either to know or to utilise the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* in order to become an *ariyapuggala*, an enlightened or liberated personality[14], citing the *Yodhājīva Vagga* in the *Tikanipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*[15] as supporting his claim. Buddhadāsa in fact proposes that Theravāda Buddhism would be better off without the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* altogether,

[12]ibid. p.110.

[13]id., *Tekitcakam* ("เตกิจฺจกรรม" *Tekiccakamma*), p.294.

[14]Four types of *ariyapuggala* are traditionally recognised: *sotāpanna*, *sakidāgāmi*, *anāgāmi*, and *arahant*.

[15]Buddhadāsa gives as his reference Vol.20/verse580/p.370 in the Pali edition of the *Tipiṭaka* published by Mahamakut Buddhist University Press. This corresponds to the *Assa Sutta* No.1 in the Thai language edition, found at Vol.20/verse580/p.278.

> Should we toss the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* away completely ... nothing would be lost because we would still retain the *Suttanta* [*Suttapiṭaka*], which is the practical aspect of the scriptures for attaining *nibbāna* quickly ... But what! Now we have just the opposite [in Thailand]: attempts to throw out the *Suttantapiṭaka* completely and leave only the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. Buddhism is going to the dogs! ... If all the *Suttantapiṭaka* is thrown out leaving only the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* humanity will go to the dogs! We could not correctly follow the Noble Eightfold Path [*ariyamagga*] that leads to *nibbāna*. But if we were to get rid of every last bit of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* ... we could still follow the path to *nibbāna*, and easily at that, because we would not have the path obscured or our minds confused by that *Abhidhammapiṭaka*.(T)[16]

These criticisms of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka's* "excesiveness" are not purely theoretical but appear to be related to Buddhadāsa's concern to make Buddhist meditative and soteriological practices accessible to the layperson. Mastery of the complex analyses of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, an attainment requiring sustained intellectual application for some years, has historically been associated with one type of clerical meditative practice. However, the use of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as a guide to meditation is not the only Buddhist meditative system and Buddhadāsa's criticisms are perhaps meant to indicate that laypeople do not need to devote years to an academic study of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* before they can undertake meditative practices.

Buddhadāsa's criticisms also appear to be related to the general fundamentalist character of his re-interpretative enterprise. Despite the novelty of some of his views on specific points of doctrine Buddhadāsa authorises his re-interpretations by claiming that they are consistent with the original teachings of the Buddha as recorded in the *Suttapiṭaka*. The *Suttapiṭaka* is consequently the most important section of the Buddhist canon for him, in particular those sections containing the reputed actual words of the Buddha. Buddhadāsa follows this fundamentalist course in order to cut through what he regards as the misinterpretations of later commentaries and so penetrate to the original, pure core of Buddhism. Thus when Buddhadāsa correctly states that, "The *Abhidhammapiṭaka* does not exist in the form of the Buddha's words."(T)[17], he is also saying that in his opinion the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* lacks the religious authority of the *Suttapiṭaka* and so should

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[16] Cited by **Bunmī Mēthāngkūn**, in *Tō Thān Phutthathāt Rȳang Cit-wāng - Lem* 1 ("โตทานพุทธทาสเรื่องจิตวาง – เลม 1" *Criticisms of Buddhadāsa on the Matter of Cit-wāng - Book* 1), Ongkān Phithak Phutthasāsanā Aphitham Mūlanithi (องคการพิทักษพุทธศาสนา อภิธรรมมูลนิธิ), Bangkok, 2522 (1979), pp.33-34.

[17] **Phutthathāt**, *Aphitham Khȳ Arai* ("อภิธรรมคืออะไร"), p.4.

not be given equal standing with or priority over the simpler but authentic discourses recorded in the *Suttapiṭaka*.

Buddhadāsa expands his attack on the authenticity and religious authority of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* to include a criticism of the way it has historically been studied in Thailand, and the purposes to which it has been put. He not only claims that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* itself cannot be regarded as being on par with the *Suttapiṭaka* but that those monks who study *Abhidhamma* teachings in Thailand content themselves with even less authoritative commentaries on the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, avoiding study of the more difficult original text. Buddhadāsa notes that around the twelfth Buddhist century (sixth to seventh centuries of the Christian era) Ceylonese commentators summarised the voluminous and complex *Abhidhammapiṭaka* into a much more compact text called the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*[18]. Over the centuries many further commentaries were based on this radically abridged version of the original canon. Mrs Rhys Davids observes that,

> The *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, whether on account of its completer survey of what is known as *Abhidhamma*, or because of its excessively condensed treatment, or because of its excellence as a handbook, stimulated a larger growth of ancillary works than any of the foregoing [list of Pali commentaries].[19]

Buddhadāsa asserts that the commentaries based on the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* came more and more to emphasise the supernatural and the miraculous in the stead of the original analytical emphasis of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* itself. He claims that this trend to supernaturalist readings of the *Abhidhamma* has developed so far in Thailand that the *Abhidhamma* studied and taught there today should be called "rat's nest *Abhidhamma*" (aphitham rang-nū - อภิธรรมรังหนู)[20], because it is full of odds and ends. That is, Buddhadāsa claims that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* has become associated with the popular supernatural religion, in contradistinction with the original intentions of the texts' authors. One of the supernatural associations of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is

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[18]In the Introduction to her edited version of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* Mrs Rhys-Davids dates the text's composition by its reputed author, Aniruddha, to between the eighth and twelfth centuries A.D.

[19](Mrs) Rhys Davids, p.8.

[20]These details are taken from a citation of Buddhadāsa's book *Aphitham Khȳ Arai* ("อภิธรรมคืออะไร, in Buṇmī Mēthāṇgkūn, *Tō Thān Phutthathāt Ryang Cit-wāng - Lem 1* ("โตทานพุทธทาสเรื่องจิตวาง – เลม 1"), p.11.

demonstrated in Thai funeral practices, sections of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* traditionally being chanted at funeral services because of a mythical association with communicating with the dead. Wells comments,

> The *Abhidhamma* is used at funerals both because it is considered to contain the essence of the teaching of the Buddha and because it was used by the Buddha when he preached to his mother after her death and ascension to the *tāvātiṁsa* heaven.[21]

It is not because of the specific relevance of its teachings that sections of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* are recited at Thai funerals. In fact the **content** of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is largely irrelevant in this context, the mere recitation being more important because of the belief that the spirit of the deceased may benefit from the teachings. In this context Buddhadāsa is not so much critical of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* **per se**, which he has nevertheless criticised for other reasons as discussed above. Rather, he is critical of the supernaturalist interpretation of Buddhism which is often justified in Thailand by reference either to some tradition or legend concerning the *Abhidhamma* or to specific supernatuarlist interpretations of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* itself. However, the distinction between criticisms of the historical use and interpretation of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and criticisms of the texts themselves is not always clear, and Buddhadāsa tends to use arguments against supernaturalist readings of the *Abhidhamma* as arguments against the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* itself.

4.3 Criticisms of Buddhadāsa's Rejection of The *Abhidhammapiṭaka*.

Those Thai Buddhists who base their interpretation and practice of the religion upon the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* are some of Buddhadāsa's most vocal critics, for he attacks the very foundation of the form of Buddhism they teach and practice. For example, in opposition to Buddhadāsa's claim that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is "not in the form of the Buddha's words" Winay Siwakun retorts that,

> the science for the transcendence of the suffering of life which is found in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is a result of the realisation of the Lord Buddha.(T)[22]

That is, Winay claims that although the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is not composed

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[21] Wells, p.225.

[22] Winay Siwakun (วินัย ศิวกุล), *Cit-cai Khȳ Arai* ("จิตใจคืออะไร" *What is the Mind?*), Aphitham Mūlanithi (อภิธรรมมูลนิธิ), Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.3.

from the Buddha's actual discourses it is nevertheless consistent with the spiritual insights revealed in the *Suttapiṭaka*.

As discussed above one of Buddhadāsa's principle goals in attempting to undermine the authority of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is to discredit the spirit cults and supernatural beliefs which have become associated with the commentaries on the *Abhidhamma*. Buddhadāsa has vehemently criticised the association of popular spirit cults with Buddhism, saying that, "We should not let our most perfect Buddhism be changed into an animistic faith like that of the uncivilised."(T)[23] Buddhadāsa is also concerned to present rationalist interpretations of apparently supernatural phenomena. For example, he describes belief in ghosts and spirits as possibly resulting from a collective psychological or hypnotic effect,

> The influence of the collective mental flow of many ignorant people can have enough power to possess the minds of foolish individuals ... and accordingly develop in them the feeling that such things are true and so cause them to believe in ghostly and magical things ... the thing called *avijjā* [ignorance] builds up such erroneous beliefs.(T)[24]

That the primary focus of Buddhadāsa's criticisms of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is in fact on attacking animist and supernatural beliefs is further indicated by the fact that the proponents of the *Abhidhamma* in Thailand, in defending their views against Buddhadāsa's attacks, are most concerned to defend the reality and the existence of the spirits and supernatural beings that Buddhadāsa denies. For example, in his defence of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* in the face of Buddhadāsa's criticisms Anan Sênākhan notes the four *yoni* or modes of generation mentioned in the *Suttapiṭaka*, where all beings are classed as either womb-born, egg-born, moisture-born or *opapātika*. This last category denotes creatures having "spontaneous" births, that is, without the instrumentality of parents. Anan regards this mode of generation as referring to the process by which actual superhuman and subhuman beings are "born" or come into existence in heaven and hell. In contrast Buddhadāsa interprets the notion of "birth" in phāsā-tham as referring to the deluded idea of individuality - that there is an essential self or *attā*,

> The word "birth" refers to the arising of the mistaken idea of "I", "myself". It does not refer to physical birth, as generally supposed. The mistaken assumption that this word "birth" refers to physical birth is a

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[23] **Phutthathāt,** *Phī Mī Cing Rȳ Mai* (ผีมีจริงหรือไม่ *Are Ghosts Real?*), **Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา Samutprakan Thailand, 2522 (1979), p.10.**

[24] ibid. pp.4-5.

major obstacle to comprehending the Buddha's teaching.[25]

It was noted in the previous chapter that Buddhadàsa regards heaven and hell as states of mind and demons and thēwadā as humans who are respectively experiencing states of suffering and enjoyment. In phāsā-tham Buddhadàsa then interprets the notion of *opapàtika*, or beings spontaneously born in heaven and hell, as metaphorically referring to the processes by which the notions of "I am a suffering individual" and "I am a happy individual" come into being.

Anan rejects this reduction of the supernatural to psychological states, saying,

> Opapātika are beings which have both concrete [*rūpa*] and abstract [*nāma*] existence. They have both bodies and minds but their bodies are composed of translucent atomic particles[26]. One could say they have divine bodies but the truth is that they have fine material bodies. *Opapàtika* are **people** who we cannot see with our unaided eyes.(T)[27]

Buddhist philosophy analyses the aggregates or *khandha* constituting human existence into two main categories, *rūpa* or materiality and *nàma* or mental factors. In modern Thai these two terms also respectively denote the paired notions of "concrete" or rūpatham (รูปธรรม) and "abstract" or nāmatham (นามธรรม), in the sense that matter is concrete while thought is abstract. In his phàsà-tham interpretations Buddhadàsa gives thèwadà and demons only an abstract or nàmatham existence. Demons and thēwadā are according to Buddhadàsa no more than mental states and have no concrete or material existence. By emphasising the material albeit fine atomic nature of thèwadā and spirits Anan is attempting to ward off the possibility of reducing them to purely abstract psychological states. By asserting their material character Anan ensures that in his interpretation of Buddhism spirits remain actually existing non-human beings. The purported materiality of spirits is thus the lynchpin of Anan's position, for without it there is

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[25]**Buddhadāsa**, *Another Kind of Birth*, trans. R.B. (no other details given), no publisher given, Bangkok, 1974, p.3.

[26]In a related discussion Bunmī Mēthāngkūn cites an *Abhidhamma* commentary as providing the following elemental analysis of matter: One bean seed or *dhaññamāsa* is equivalent to seven lice or *ūkā*, one *ūkā* is equal to seven louse eggs or *likkhā*, one *likkhā* is equal to thirty six bits of chariot dust or *ratharenu*, one *ratharenu* is equal to thirty six *tajjāri* (?), one *tajjāri* is equal to thirty six atoms or *ānu* and one *ānu* is regarded as being made up of thirty six ultimate atoms or *paramānu*. One *paramānu* is thus equivalent to 1/82,301,184 of a bean seed. Bunmī then says that *opapātika* are made up of a translucent form of *paramānu*. Cited at Bunmī Mēthāngkūn, *Tō Thān Phutthathāt Rūang Awichā Lae Phī-sāng-thēwadā - Lem 2*. ("โตทานพุทธทาสเรื่องอวิชชาและผีสางเทวดา – เลม 2" *Criticisms of Buddhadāsa on the Matter of Spirits and Celestial Beings - Book Two*), Aphitham Mūlanithi (อภิธรรมมูลนิธิ), Bangkok, 2523 (1980), p.27.

[27]**Anan** Sēnākhan, *Khamsōrn Dīarathī* ("คำสอนเดียรถีย์"), p.61.

no easy way to deny Buddhadāsa's interpretation that spirits are in fact simply mental states.

Buddhadāsa has not remained completely silent in the face of these criticisms of his views. However, his reply, in the form of counter criticisms, is not explicitly directed at Anan Sēnākhan or Winay Sivakun and is presented in the context of a discussion of the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda* or dependent origination, a notion which is discussed in detail immediately below. Buddhadāsa considers Buddhist teachings about the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda* and specifically about birth and rebirth to have long been misinterpreted because of the implicit acceptance of the notion of *attā* (i.e. that there is an individual self or soul). He maintains that the mistaken views that there is a self and that there is entitative continuity between one life and the next have been implicitly accepted within Theravāda Buddhism since the Third Buddhist Council, which was held only three hundred years after the Buddha's death. He acknowledges that this scriptural misinterpretation may have arisen unintentionally and because of ignorance and intellectual slackness in interpreting the subtleties of Buddhist doctrine. However, he also suggests that its acceptance may have been the result of a conspiracy to destroy Buddhism,

> There might have been rebellious traitors acting as destructive agents inside Buddhism who [deliberately] and maliciously explained *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the foundation of Buddhism, incorrectly. That is, so that it would become the eternalist doctrine [*sassataditṭhi*] found in Hinduism, or [in other words] change into Brahmanism ... If there were such harmful intentions it would mean that someone must have feigned an explanation [of *paṭiccasamuppāda*] so as to create a channel for the *attā* doctrine to come into Buddhism. And then Brahmanism would swallow Buddhism ... this is a surmise from the standpoint that there could have been harmful [influences within Buddhism].(T)[28]

With uncharacteristic sectarianism Buddhadāsa adds that the motivation behind such a treacherous plot could be that, "Brahmanism is an enemy of Buddhism, it wants to swallow Buddhism."(T)[29] These criticisms, however, do not have a simply historical import. The clear implication of Buddhadāsa's statements is that if Brahmanical ideas of an eternal self or soul were dangerous over two thousand years ago then they, and those purported Buddhists who today teach that human beings are in fact reborn as spirits and demons are equally harmful today.

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[28] **Phutthathāt**, *Patitcasamupapāt Cāk Phra Ōt* ("ปฏิจจสมุปบาทจากพระโอษฐ์" *Paṭiccasamuppāda in the Buddha's Words*), Thammathān Mūlanithi (ธรรมทานมูลนิธิ), Chaiya Thailand, 2524 (1981), p.77.

[29] ibid. p.78.

Buddhadāsa thus accuses those who claim he is destroying Buddhism of precisely the same crime.

4.4 Buddhadāsa's Criticisms of the *Visuddhimagga* and the Traditional Interpretation of the *Paṭiccasamuppāda.*

As already noted it is not only the authority of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* that Buddhadāsa attempts to undermine in order to establish his phāsā-tham or demythologised interpretation of Buddhist doctrine. The *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa also comes in for criticism. Written in the fifth century as a summary of Buddhist teachings the *Visuddhimagga* has become the most reverred of all Theravāda commentaries. Sunthorn Na-Rangsi says of the *Visuddhimagga* that it is, "regarded by the Theravādins as an authentic source of Buddhist teachings second only to the Pali *Tipiṭaka* itself."[30] Perhaps because of the respect traditionally accorded the *Visuddhimagga* Buddhadāsa's criticisms of Buddhaghosa's views are somewhat guarded,

> I don't respect or believe in Buddhaghosācāriya one hundred per cent because there are parts [of the *Visuddhimagga*] I have quite some disagreement with. I can respect up to ninety or ninety five per cent of Buddhaghosa's teachings.(T)[31]

Buddhadāsa's main point of disagreement with Buddhaghosa concerns the interpretation of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the doctrine of dependent origination. Through a series of causally linked stages the *paṭiccasamuppāda* demonstrates how ignorance, *avijjā*, leads to attachment, *upādāna*, and how attachment in turn leads to suffering. The *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a systematic explication of the Buddhist doctrine that ignorance of reality is the root cause of human suffering. Conversely, the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is also taken as detailing how attaining wisdom and overcoming ignorance leads to the cessation of suffering and so to *nibbāna*. The twelve causally linked stages of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, also called *bhavacakka* or the cycle of becoming, are in order as follows:

(1) *avijjā* - ignorance,
(2) *saṅkhāra* - mental "formations" associated with volitional or *kamma*-creating actions,
(3) *viññāṇa* - consciousness,
(4) *nāmarūpa* - the five aggregates or *khandhas* constitutive of individual human existence,

[30]**Na-Rangsi**, p.86.

[31]**Phutthathāt**, *Patitcasamupapāt Cǎk Phra Òt* ("ปฏิจจสมุปบาทจากพระโอษฐ์"), p.95.

(5) *salāyatana* - the six bases of sense impressions[32],
(6) *phassa* - sense contact, the six types of sense impressions,
(7) *vedanā* - feelings resulting from sense impressions,
(8) *taṇhā* - craving for the six types of sensorily cognisable objects,
(9) *upādāna* - attachment or clinging to sensed objects,
(10) *bhava* - coming into being, becoming,
(11) *jāti* - birth conditioned by *bhava*,
(12) *jarāmaraṇa* - old age and death.

Jarāmaraṇa denotes suffering which results from birth, *jāti*[33], which has itself been conditioned by all the preceeding ten factors beginning with ignorance. The suffering of *jarāmaraṇa* is in turn regarded as being a condition for the arising of ignorance, and is consequently the starting point for another cycle of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* or cycle of becoming. The *paṭiccasamuppāda* is in every sense a vicious circle, with each stage feeding on the former and contributing to the next.

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* has also traditionally been regarded as providing the theoretical basis of the account of the process of rebirth. Buddhaghosa interpreted the twelve spokes of the *bhavacakka* as in fact spanning three separate lives and in the *Visuddhimagga* he wrote,

> The past, the present and the future are its [i.e. the *paṭiccasamuppāda*'s] three times. Of these it should be understood that, according to what is given in the texts, the two factors ignorance and formations [*saṅkhāra*] belong to the past time, the eight beginning with consciousness belong to the present time, and the two, birth and aging-and-death, belong to the future time.[34]

In this interpretation rebirth is accounted for by the postulation of a special relation between consciousness, *viññāṇa*, and formations, *saṅkhāra*. As Na-Rangsi comments, in the *paṭiccasamuppāda*,

> the function of consciousness is twofold; to cognise the object presented and to constitute the subterranean stream of consciousness [*bhavaṅga*] which is the basis of individuality.[35]

Traditionally it is consciousness in a "subterranean" or *bhavaṅga* mode which is regarded as forming the basis of individual identity. In its *bhavaṅga* mode

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[32]Buddhism lists six senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch and mind. As Sunthorn Na-Rangsi notes, "Buddhism regards the mind or consciousness as the sixth sense which has mental states or mental phenomena as its objects of contact."(Na-Rangsi, p.61.)

[33]The Pali term *jāti* (Thai: chāt) literally denotes "birth", but is generally used in the sense of "rebirth". *Jāti* can also be rendered into English as "life" in the sense of "past life", "future life", etc.

[34]*Visuddhimagga*, XVII, 287.

[35]Na-Rangsi, p.191.

consciousness functions as a matrix in which character and personality-determining *kammic* residues inhere. In order to remain consistent with the doctrine of *anattà* and avoid the implication that the rebirth doctrine denotes that there is an entity or soul which re-incarnates in successive lives this subterranean mode of consciousness is explicitly presented as **not** being a self-existing entity or self. Rather, it is described as being a process with a definite origination and end. It is maintained that the *bhavaṅga* consciousness underlying each successive life is in fact distinct and discrete, beginning at conception and ending at death. The actual link between successive births (i.e. between the cessation of one *bhavaṅga* condition at death and the origination of the next *bhavaṅga* at conception) is called the *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*. It is this *paṭisandhi* consciousness which transfers the *kammic* impressions or *saṅkhàra* determining the character or fate from one existence to the next. That is, Theravâda Buddhism proposes that *kammic* residues are transfered from one life condition to another (via the discrete transferral process called *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*) but that successive existences are in fact distinct and discrete. This is because the identity-giving *bhavaṅga* consciousness underlying each existence is posited as being a finite phenomenon specific to each individual existence.

Buddhadâsa, however, denies that the causal linkages of the *paṭiccasamuppàda* provide an account of literal rebirth. He instead maintains that the cycle of dependent origination should be taken as explaining the arising of suffering at any moment during a given life. Buddhadâsa denies that rebirth is central to Buddhist doctrine. As noted above he says that the notion of "birth" should be interpreted in phāsā-tham as the psychological arising of the deluded sense of individuality or selfhood, not as denoting literal birth or rebirth. Buddhadâsa's denial of the importance of the notion of "rebirth" to Buddhist teachings is one of his most radical claims, which not only stands in opposition to the Theravâda interpretative tradition as represented by the *Visuddhimagga* but also counters the explicit references to rebirth in the core canonical scriptures of the *Suttapiṭaka*. Sunthorn Na-Rangsi says,

> In the Pali scriptures there are many stories telling about some of the Buddha's disciples who passed away and assumed new births in some realm of existence or other. All such stories stand as scriptural proofs of rebirth.[36]

Recollections of past lives, such as indicated in the following passage from the *Potaliya Sutta*, are commonly reported in the *Suttapiṭaka*,

> Behold householder, this *ariyasāvaka* [follower of the Buddha], abiding in

[36] ibid., p.xi.

upekkhā [equanimity] as the cause of a pure mind without any greater *dhamma*, can recall many past lives, can recall one life, two lives ... ten lives ... a hundred lives, a thousand lives, a hundred thousand lives through many eons of world development and many eons of world dissolution.(T)[37]

While in this passage it is possible to interpret term "life" or "birth" (*jāti*) in phāsā-tham as the arising of the sense of self, and the term "world" as denoting a psychological condition, there are other passages in the *suttas* where the reference to literal rebirth is less easily interpreted metaphorically. For example, in the *Siṅgālaka Sutta* the Buddha admonishes the layman Siṅgālaka, saying that one who follows the *vinaya* or discipline of the Buddha,

Naturally practises for victory over both worlds ... both this world and the next. In the future after having died because of the body's break down that *ariyasāvaka* [follower of the Buddha] will naturally attain to the *sugati* heavenly world.(T)[38]

Buddhaghosa clearly indicates in the *Visuddhimagga* that he does not intend *jāti* or birth, the eleventh spoke of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, to be interpreted metaphorically when he says that birth,

should be regarded as the aggregates [*khandhas*] that occur from the time of rebirth-linking [*paṭisandhiviññāṇa*] up to the exit from the mother's womb.[39]

Buddhadāsa's opposition to this ancient teaching is consequently no light matter. However, it should also be noted that belief in rebirth is nowhere included among the central articles of belief or among the key doctrines of Buddhism. In denying rebirth Buddhadāsa thus flaunts both tradition and sections of the scriptures but he does not contradict any fundamental doctrine such as *anattā*, *anicca*, *dukkha* or *nibbāna*.

Buddhadāsa's preparedness to contradict even sections of the *Suttapiṭaka* in addition to denying the authority of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and of commentaries reveals that his methodological approach to re-interpreting Buddhism is doctrinal rather than scriptural. That is, Buddhadāsa is above all concerned to present a systematic interpretation of Theravāda teachings which is completely consistent with doctrinal principles. For Buddhadāsa logical consistency with the doctrinal fundamentals of Buddhism is the most important determinant of authoritative

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37 *Potaliya Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, Vol.13/verse54/pp.39-40.

38 *Siṅgālaka Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol.11/verse174/p.139.

39 *Visuddhimagga*, XVI, 33.

interpretations of the teachings. The Buddhist scriptures, while providing guidelines and insights, are not taken as the ultimate source of doctrinal authority and are discarded by Buddhadâsa wherever they contradict his strictly doctrinal and modernist views.

Buddhadâsa argues for his metaphorical interpretation of the notion of "birth" by claiming that the belief in rebirth, as presented in the *Visuddhimagga* and as generally understood in Thailand, contradicts the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* - i.e. that there is no essential self to either human or non-human existence. He claims that belief in rebirth may easily become the false doctrine of *sassataditthi*, that there is in fact an eternal self. Buddhadâsa warns,

> Be careful in this matter of the "next life". One small error will make it the *sassataditthi* [eternalist doctrine] of the Brahmins. That is, believing that when some person has died that he himself will be born again.(T)[40]

He argues that according to the traditional interpretation of "birth" in Buddhism,

> A person's *kilesa* in a previous life effect *kammic* results in this life ... those *kammic* results in this life then cause *kilesa* to arise anew in this life, which then effects *kammic* results in a subsequent life. When *paticcasamuppāda* is taught like this it becomes a teaching about *attā* [essential self]. It becomes a teaching that there are *attā*, selves, beings and individuals.(T)[41]

In contradistinction with the interpretation presented in the *Visuddhimagga* Buddhadâsa denies that *viññāṇa*, the third element in the *paticcasamuppāda* series, can be regarded as meaning "rebirth-linking consciousness" or *patisandhiviññāṇa*[42]. Instead he maintains that *viññāṇa* straightforwardly refers to the six modes of sensory consciousness recognised in Buddhist teachings. Buddhadâsa makes this claim despite the clear association of the notion of *patisandhi* with rebirth in the *suttas*, as in the following passage from the *Jhānakathā* in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*,

> In a previous *kammicly*-determined existence delusion was *avijjā*, the aggregate of *kamma* was *saṅkhāra*, satisfaction [in sensuality] was *taṇhā*, immersion [in sensuality] was *upādāna*, and consideration [of being] was *bhava*. These five *dhammas* in the previous *kamma*-existence were the determining factors of *patisandhi* in this life. *patisandhi* was consciousness and its development was into *nāmarūpa* and nerves, which became the

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[40] **Phutthathât**, "Upasak Häeng Kân-phōōy-phrââ Tham" (อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม), p.57.

[41] id., *Patitcasamupapât Cãk Phra Òt* (ปฏิจจสมุปบาทจากพระโอษฐ์), p.74.

[42] ibid. p.66.

twelve sense spheres [*āyatana*].(T)[43]

Buddhadāsa does not acknowledge that his denial of rebirth contradicts such explicit references in the canonical scriptures. However, the fact that Buddhadāsa is prepared to oppose even sections of the scriptures that he himself regards as being the most authentic and authoritative, i.e. the *Suttapiṭaka*, further indicates that the guiding principle of his re-interpretations is consistency with what he regards as the basic doctrines of Buddhism, not faithful abidance to any specific text.

Buddhadāsa's critique of the notion of literal rebirth in fact raises again an ancient theoretical difficulty of Buddhist doctrine, namely, how to reconcile the doctrine of *anattā* with belief in rebirth. If there is rebirth, what is it that is reborn if, as the Buddha taught, there is no self or soul which re-incarnates? The interpretation of consciousness in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* series as having subliminal (*bhavaṅga*) and rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi*) aspects, as described above, has traditionally been regarded as having resolved this problem. In this interpretation consciousness or *viññāṇa* is defined as a dependent characteristic of each individual existence, having no independent existence and not continuing beyond death. However, in its subliminal or *bhavaṅga* mode consciousness is regarded as having the capacity to transfer *kammic* momenta to another subsequent existence, passing some of its own characteristics on to the *bhavaṅga* consciousness associated with that subsequent existence.

However, Buddhadāsa approaches the problem of resolving the conflict between the doctrines of *anattā* and rebirth from an altogether different perspective, by redefining what is meant by "birth". Buddhadāsa develops his interpretation of the notion of "birth" or *jāti* by focussing on the teaching that, "True happiness consists in eliminating the false idea of 'I' (*asminānassa vinaya etam ve paramaṁ sukhaṁ.*")[44] He defines "the false idea of 'I'" or *attā* as denoting the subjective sense of self together with the self-centred or selfish attitudes associated with it. According to this definition *anattā* denotes not just the ontological doctrine of "non-self" or "non-esentiality" but also the ethical notion of "non-self-centredness" or "unselfishness". That true happiness results from the ending of suffering by the elimination of the false idea of "I" is interpreted by Buddhadāsa as meaning the ending of self-centredness. In this context he notes a related Buddhist maxim which

[43] *Jhānakathā*, *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Vol.31/verse98/p.39.

[44] Buddhadāsa, *Another Kind of Birth*, p.1.

states that, "Birth is perpetual suffering (*dukkha jāti punapunnam*)."[45] Here, Buddhadāsa maintains that the "birth" which engenders suffering is not actual physical birth but rather the arising of the false idea of "I" and of self-centredness. He asks,

> Just what is this rebirth? What is it that is reborn? The birth referred to is a mental event, something taking place in the mind, the non-physical side of our make-up. This is birth in *dhamma* language.[46]

In Buddhadāsa's system one is "reborn" when one's notion of selfhood or psychological identity undergoes a shift,

> The word "birth" only means a single change of thought about "I" and "mine". It is one birth if we think like a thief and are born a thief and it is another birth the moment we have returned to thinking like a normal person and so have changed to be born as a person.(T)[47]

That is, in phāsā-tham to be "born" a thief is to psychologically identify with being a thief, and to be born a "person" is to regard oneself as a "person". Buddhadāsa also re-interprets the notion of "death" in Buddhism, saying that, "To die means that 'I' and 'mine' die completely."(T)[48] That is, death in phāsā-tham is not the physical end of life but the ending of the deluded notion of individuality, and since to end the delusion of selfhood is to be free of the "rebirth" that causes suffering it is also to be freed of suffering, which is the defintion of *nibbāna*. As Buddhadāsa notes,

> In the words of an old saying, "*nibbāna* is to die before dying" ... That is, the *kilesa* - the causes of the feeling that there is an "I" or a "mine" - it is they that die.(T)[49]

In Buddhadāsa's system all notions traditionally associated with rebirth, such as *saṁsāra* or the cycle of rebirth and suffering, are systematically re-interpreted in terms of phāsā-tham. For example, he says that if,

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[45]ibid.

[46]ibid. pp.4-5.

[47]**Phutthathāt**, "Upasak Hāeng Kān-phōēy-phrāē Tham" (อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม), P.60.

[48] id., *Khwām Suk Thī Thāē Mī Yū Tāē Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขที่แท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน" *True Happiness Exists Only in Work*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา) Bangkok, 2521 (1978), p.157.

[49]ibid.

> at any time when there exists the idea "I"-"mine", at that time there exists birth, suffering and the cycle of *saṁsāra*. . The "I" is born, endures for a moment, then ceases; is born again, endures for a moment and again ceases - which is why the process is refered to as the **cycle** of *saṁsāra*.(T)[50]

Because "birth" has traditionally been interpreted literally its place in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* series, where it is a causal precursor to suffering or *dukkha*, has meant that in Theravāda Buddhism physical existence has been regarded as being inherently and inextricably associated with suffering. That is, in traditional Theravāda teachings the suffering from which liberation is sought is regarded as being as much physical as mental. This is made clear from the inclusion of the physical processes of aging and death and of pain in the traditional explication of *dukkha* or suffering in the *Visuddhimagga*,

> with birth as condition there is aging and death, and sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair; thus there is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.[51]

However, for Buddhadāsa *dukkha* or suffering, in the sense of the condition from which Buddhism seeks release, only follows from the birth of self-centredness, not from literal physical birth. He consequently defines *dukkha* solely as mental suffering,

> A person has a physical birth only once, and finally dies just once, but they can have mental birth and extinction many times. Even in a single day there can be many cycles of birth and extinction ... and each time it [that mental birth] is suffering. For this reason the *dhammic* doctrines which mention suffering denote mental suffering.(T)[52]

That is, for Buddhadāsa the only religiously significant suffering is mental pain or mental dis-ease. Physical suffering is not denied by Buddhadāsa but he does not regard it as religiously significant. That is, because the cause of physical suffering lies in the material world he regards its alleviation as being a matter of applying material rather than religious or spiritual remedies. Thus in Buddhadāsa's system suffering, in the religious sense of ignorance-caused *dukkha*, is no longer regarded as being inescapably inherent in phyiscal birth. For Buddhadāsa existence in the material world is not necessarily a state of imperfection and inadequacy. The

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[50] ibid. p.7.

[51] *Visuddhimagga*, XVII, 2.

[52] Phutthathāt, *Dūang Tā Thī Hen Tham* ("ดวงตาที่เห็นธรรม" *The Eye That Sees Dhamma*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2511 (1968), p.9.

elimination of the negative spiritual connotations associated with physical existence in the material world is one of the most important aspects of Buddhadāsa's re-interpretative system. For, as will be discussed in later chapters, he wishes to abolish the traditional role division between a world-involved layperson and a renunciate monk, by giving the layperson access to traditionally clerical practices and by according spiritual value to the activities of the layperson in the social world. Buddhadāsa wishes to interpret this world and this life as the domain of Buddhism's concern and as the locale of salvation, not some transcendent or post-death state.

Traditionally the notion of "world", *loka*, in Buddhist doctrine, as in English, fundamentally connotes materiality, the earth and all that constitutes and populates it. The term "world" is also used in the sense of heavenly and hellish "worlds". However, in Buddhist thought the term *loka* has an additional negative association with impermanence, *anicca*, and with suffering. On this point Ñāṇamoli cites a comment in the *Paramatthamañjūsā*, a commentary on the *Visuddhimagga*,

> The round [of birth, i.e. *saṁsāra*] ... (including fine material and immaterial heavens) is called the world [*loka*] because of its crumbling [*lujjana*] and disintegration [*palujjana*].[53]

However, Buddhadāsa's phāsā-tham interpretation of the term "world" should be noted here,

> In *dhamma* language [phāsā-tham] the word "world" refers to the worldly [*lokiya*] mental state, the worldly stage in the scale of mental development ... the condition which is impermanent, changing, unsatisfactory [i.e. *dukkha*] ... Hence it is said that the world is the unsatisfactory conditional [*dukkha*]; the unsatisfactory condition is the world.[54]

The traditional negative valuation of existence and activity in the material world asociated with Theravāda teachings is completely absent from Buddhadāsa's work. He systematically reduces the field of Buddhist spiritual action from a cosmic to a psychological level, which implies that not only may this material life be freed of *dukkha* (i.e. mental suffering) but also that is is only within the psychological dimension of this material life that liberation can be sought. In other words Buddhadāsa's re-interpretation of Theravāda Buddhism implies that the material world, here and now, is the **only** field of Buddhist spiritual activity and the **only**

[53] *Paramatthamañjūsā* 91, cited by Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, in his translation of the *Visuddhimagga*, at *Visuddhimagga*, III, 5n., (p.85n).

[54] Buddhadāsa, *Two Kinds of Language*, p.15.

domain on which its benefits, i.e. enlightenment and *nibbàna*, are enjoyed. In his reformulation of the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppàda*, his denial of rebirth and his emphasis on the here and now Buddhadàsa thus lays the groundwork for a more "worldly" or socially involved interpretation of Buddhism. There is in fact a fundamental continuity between Buddhadàsa's theoretical re-interpretations of doctrine and spiritual theory and his social theory which is analysed and studied in Chapters Eight and Nine.

4.5 Criticisms of Buddhadàsa's Re-interpretations of "Birth".

The supporters of the *Abhidhamma* in Thailand vehemently disagree with Buddhadàsa's phàsà-tham interpretation of birth and rebirth. Anan Sènàkhan affirms that, "'Birth' denotes the birth of all sentient beings, according to their respective categories in the thirty one realms of existence."(T)[55] That is he affirms the traditional Buddhist cosmology of rebirth in various heavens or hells according to one's merit or demerit. An associate of Anan's and senior member of the Abhidhamma Foundation, Bunmì Mèthàngkùn, maintains that, "If the cycle of birth and death [i.e. *saṁsàra*] as a being in various worlds should not be, Buddhism will fall into decay."(T)[56] By this Bunmì means two things. Firstly, he means that if the cycle of *saṁsàra* does not in fact exist and, "If we are only born for a single life and there is no rebirth then there is no need to have the Buddha, and his teachings are meaningless."(T)[57] And, secondly, Bunmì implies that if the metaphysical phenomenon of *saṁsàra* does exist but people like Buddhadàsa deny its reality then that misguided view can only mean that spiritual liberation from the cycle of rebirth will not even be sought for, let alone be attained. Buddhism would consequently utterly fail to provide salvation and would amount to a meaningless religion.

However, there is a sense in which Anan's and Bunmì's criticisms of Buddhadàsa are misdirected. Buddhadàsa does not in fact completely deny the actuality of literal rebirth. What he does deny is the spiritual relevance of actual rebirth to the soteriological enterprise of Buddhism. Buddhadàsa says,

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[55] **Anan** Sènàkhan, *Khamsòrn Dìarathì* ("คำสอนเดียรถีย์"), p.40.

[56] **Bunmì** Mèthàngkùn, *Tò Thàn Phutthathàt Rỳang Cit-wàng - Lem 1* ("โตทานพุทธทาสเรื่องจิตวาง – เลม 1"), p.57.

[57] **Bunmì** Mèthàngkùn, "Phiksu Phù Thamlày Phutthasàsanà" ("ภิกษุผู้ทำลายพุทธศาสนา" "The Monk Who is Destroying Buddhism"), in **Anan** Sènàkhan (ed), *Khamsòrn Dìarathì* (คำสอนเดียรถีย์), Ongkàn Phithak Phutthasàsanà (องค์การพิทักษ์พุทธศาสนา), 2522 (1979), p.92.

> If we can master this kind of birth [of "I"] here and now we will also be able to master the birth that comes after physical death. So let's not concern ourselves with the birth that follows physical death. Instead let us concern ourselves seriously with the birth that happens **before** physical death.[58]

Buddhadâsa thus does not deny that *kamma* accumulated from actions performed now can influence the quality of existence in some future incarnation. However, he refocusses Buddhist doctrine and changes its emphasis, defining Buddhist doctrines as referring solely to this life here and now. By saying that a life led well now will augur well for any future birth Buuddhadâsa implicitly retains the traditional belief in literal rebirth. The contradiction between Buddhadâsa's above statement on the reality of rebirth and a previously quoted passage where he explicitly says, "A person has a physical birth only once", is only apparent. If as proposed in the doctrine of *anattâ* there is in fact no soul then even if actions in this life do cause rebirth, by whatever mechanism, it is not the precise same person who is reborn. Strictly speaking each person, as a unique individual whose character is determined by the specific factors or *khandhas* constituting his or her conditional existence, is born only once. As a conditional phenomenon individuality or "self-ness" does not transcend any specific concrete existence.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that Buddhadâsa walks a theoretical tightrope between denying and accepting literal rebirth. He does deny Buddhaghosa's use of the *paṭiccasamuppâda* to provide an account of rebirth and he also says that references to "birth" and "death" and to the "cycle of birth and death" in the Buddhist scriptures should be interpreted metaphorically. However, he does not explicitly deny the reality of rebirth. Although it is the case that in denying Buddhaghosa's interpretation of the *paṭiccasamuppâda* B uddhadâsa is left without any theoretical explanation of the mechanism of rebirth and without any resolution of the fundamental contradiction between simultaneously maintaining the doctrine of non-self and the reality of rebirth. However, Buddhadâsa is not concerned by this theoretical gap and contradiction because he maintains that Buddhism is solely concerned with life here and now. As a Buddhist he is consequently under no obligation to resolve difficulties he has defined as being outside the field of his domain of concern.

Despite his explicit concern to define Buddhism as a teaching of salvation relevant specifically to life here and now Buddhadâsa is unable to completely deny the reality of rebirth, and so complete his radical redefinition of Buddhism, because

[58] Buddhadâsa, *Another Kind of Birth*, p.19.

of insurmountable theoretical tensions. It is the case that some passages in the *Suttapiṭaka*, when taken in isolation suggest that the Buddha himself did not in fact sanction belief in rebirth or an emphasis on the after life. For example, in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* the Buddha says,

> Behold Poṭṭhapāda, these points we cannot determine, whether beings after death either continue to exist or do not continue to exist.(T)[59]

When pushed on why this could not be determined the Buddha replied,

> Behold Poṭṭhapāda, because that is not meaningful, is unrelated to the *dhamma*, is not the start of *brahmacariya*, does not proceed for the sake of tiredness [of worldliness], for extinction, for peace, for higher knowledge, for realisation, for *nibbāna*. Thus for these reasons we cannot determine [this matter].(T)[60]

In its pragmatic approach to what a Buddhist should regard as worthy of investigation and consideration this *sutta* provides scriptural support for Buddhadāsa's demythologised, this-worldly emphasis on that which is of immediate practical benefit to the ending of suffering. This *sutta* also provides support for Buddhadāsa's lack of interest in providing an alternative account of the rebirth process after his debunking of the traditional explanation put forward by Buddhaghosa. Like the Buddha Buddhadāsa regards such an intellectual exercise as having no direct relevance to the practical goal of ending suffering and consequently as being outside the purview of Buddhist concern.

However, the above comments must be balanced against the plethora of references to literal rebirth and to the next world in the main body of the *Suttapiṭaka*. For example, in *suttas* such as the *Pāyāsirājañña Sutta*[61] disbelief in the unreality of *kamma*, rebirth and the next world are respectively presented as false views which hinder acceptance of the Buddha's teaching of salvation.

It should also be noted that there is in fact a structural necessity for Buddhism to maintain the reality of rebirth. For if the accumulations of *kamma* and *saṅkhāra* are acknowledged as real, and if not all *kammic* reactions or *vipāka* are experienced in this life, then rebirth is essential for the future exhaustion or outworking of *kamma* acquired in this life plus that remaining from previous lives. Without rebirth Buddhism is left without an account of moral justice. Without

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[59] *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol.9/verse292/p.270.

[60] ibid.

[61] *Pāyāsirājañña Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol.10/verses301-330/pp.234-260.

rebirth Buddhism cannot explain why the good suffer or why the evil prosper, for by the law of *kamma* good actions reap good results and evil actions must bear the fruit of evil consequences. Because there is no immediately apparent relation between the moral quality of one's actions and the actual quality of a person's life here on earth Buddhism must postulate the existence of a future life in which the good, bad or neutral consequences of present intentional actions are experienced. Rebirth is necessary in order to make sense of the entire Buddhist moral and spiritual enterprise. Because of the relation between the notions of *kamma* and of rebirth it is then no accident that, given his emphasis on this life here and now, the notion of *kamma* and of suffering originating from past *kamma* is significantly downplayed in Buddhadāsa's system. Buddhadāsa's views on *kamma* are discussed in detail in Chapter Eight.

Because of the conceptual structure of Buddhist teachings, and because of the prevalence of references to actual rebirth in the scriptures Buddhadāsa cannot completely deny either rebirth, *kamma* or the reality of future existences. In attempting to make Theravāda Buddhism a religion of the here and now the most he can do is de-emphasise these aspects of the Buddha's teaching and correspondingly emphasise the more immediate, this-worldly aspects. Nevertheless, as noted above Buddhadāsa does in places come within a hair's breadth of actually denying both the doctrine of rebirth, and certain related scriptural passages concerning *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*. This tightrope walking quality of Buddhadāsa's discourse appears wherever traditional Buddhist teachings have to be severely stretched to match up with his modernist views.

4.6 Phra Rājavaramunī on *Paṭiccasamuppāda* and Rebirth.

As noted in the previous chapter the work of Phra Rājavaramunī often presents a more detailed analysis of doctrinal and scriptural issues on which Buddhadāsa is satisfied to simply present broad and general views. This is also the case with the issue of interpreting the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the reality of rebirth. Like Buddhadāsa Rājavaramunī criticises the interpretation that *paṭiccasamuppāda* occurs across more than one life, saying that when it is set out in great detail it tends to be adhered to rigidly as if its "excessive and confusing detail"(T)[62] is the final word on the issue. He also cites a passage from the *Suttapiṭaka* where the Buddha refuses to explain the *paṭiccasamuppāda* in terms of past or future lives because such things are not immediately demonstrable and their consideration is not spiritually profitable,

[62](Phra) **Rātchaworamunī**, *Phutthatham* (พุทธธรรม), p.86.

> Thus, reverred householder, were I to show to you the arising and passing away of suffering [i.e. the *paṭiccasamuppāda*] by referring to the past, such as, "In the past this came to pass", then you would have doubt and suspicion on this matter. And if I were to show to you the arising and the passing away of suffering by referring to the future, such as, "In the future this will come to pass", then you could also have doubt and suspicion on this matter. So reverred householder, as we sit here I will show to you who also sits here in this place the arising and the passing away of suffering.(T)[63]

The point of the above passage is that the arising and passing away of suffering, i.e. the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, is regarded as taking place in the immediate present. Rājavaramunī mentions that in a commentary on the *Vibhaṅga* of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* contained in Buddhaghosa's *Sammohavinodāni*(T)[64], a text Buddhaghosa wrote after the *Visuddhimagga*, the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is described as occurring in a single thought moment - an interpretation which is omitted from the much more oft-quoted and oft-read *Visuddhimagga*. In fact there is clear evidence that the historical **emphasis** on the interpretation that the *paṭiccasamuppāda* occurs across more than one life is post-canonical. The section of the *Vibhaṅga* in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* which deals specifically with the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is called the *Paccayākāravibhaṅga*[65], which is itself divided into two parts, the *Suttantabhajanīya*[66] and the *Abhidhammabhajanīya*[67]. The first of these two sections deals with the *paṭiccasamuppāda* interpreted as occurring across more than one life and is four pages long, while the second section deals with the interpretation that the *paṭiccasamuppāda* occurs in one thought moment and covers thirty one pages. But in Buddhaghosa's commentary, the *Sammohavinodānī*, the amount of space devoted to these two sections is inverted. The view that the *paṭiccasamuppāda* occurs across more than one life is dealt with in a nintey two page commentary while the view that *paṭiccasamuppāda* occurs in one thought moment receives only a nineteen page commentary. Buddhadāsa's interpretation therefore has support from the earlier scriptures of the actual canon, even though this view has been decreasingly emphasised with the passage of the centuries.

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[63] *Saññā Sutta*, *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, Vol.18/verse627/p.251.

[64] *Sammohavinodāni*, pp.260-278, cited by (Phra) Rātchaworamunī, *Phutthatham* ("พุทธธรรม"), pp.140-142.

[65] *Paccayākāravibhaṅga*, *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, Vol.35.

[66] *Suttantabhajanīya*, *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, Vol.35/verses255-273/pp/131-135.

[67] *Abhidhammabhajanīya*, *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, Vol.35/verses291-357/pp.146-177.

Nevertheless, Buddhadāsa's this-worldliness is itself only a one-sided view of the actual teachings contained in the Theravāda scriptures. Rājavaramuni aims to correct this imbalance when he says that he does not think the psychological view of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as occurring in a single thought moment means that belief in literal rebirth should be denied. Instead he retains both views (i.e. that the *paṭiccasamuppāda* represents an account of the arising of suffering at any given moment in a present life and in some future life) as being tenable and as being equally founded in the canonical scriptures.

4.7 Political Opposition to Buddhadāsa's Views.

There is no denying that Buddhadāsa's particularly one-sided emphasis in his interpretation of the Theravāda scriptures and the vehemence with which he attacks long-held views and beliefs is an important source of the criticisms directed against him. As Mulder notes, for most Thais Buddhadāsa's criticism of the traditional view of Buddhism is "shocking",

> All these people have always thought themselves to be good Buddhists, and now they have to hear they are not. Necessarily they feel threatened.[68]

This sense of threat goes some way to explaining the opposition to Buddhadāsa which has arisen, but it should be noted that his threat is not purely intellectual or religious. Buddhadāsa's views challenge the traditional institutional character of Thai Buddhism and its ideological role in the structure of power and culture in contemporary Thailand. Because the religious heritage he and other reformers seek to re-interpret is such an essential factor in the traditional structure of Thai society and political power then even seemingly theoretical debates on matters of doctrine may have political implications. This explains why, in Mulder's words, religious reformers in Thailand are so, "easily branded as heretics, a danger to the stability of society and thus are often called 'communists'."[69]

Bunmi Mēthāngkūn, head of the Abhidhamma Foundation Committee, criticises Buddhadāsa's demythologising of Buddhist doctrine and his emphasis on the religion as a this-worldly doctrine in the following way,

> He is one who has opened the door wide to accept those who like politics and do not hold to our religion ... in order to destroy

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[68] Mulder, *Everyday Life in Thailand*, p.146.

[69] ibid.

Buddhism.(T)[70]

That is, Bunmī regards Buddhadāsa as accommodating Buddhism to non-Buddhists (read communists) whom he and other political and religious conservatives are opposed to and whose influence such organisations as the Abhidhamma Foundation and its supporters seek to nullify by propagating their own traditional form of Buddhism. The above criticism of destroying Buddhism, both doctrinally and by allowing non-Buddhists to infiltrate and subvert the religion, is not purely religious for it is part of conservative Thai Buddhists' ideological campaign against communism to promote the notion that Buddhism is the foundation of both the monarchy and of national security. Bunmī notes,

> Buddhism is still the collective nucleus of the sympathies of the Thai people, in this they are solidly united. When Buddhism gradually degenerates what will happen? How could the nation and king continue?(T)[71]

Opposing communism, maintaining traditions and in particular supporting the monarchy, which is viewed as a symbol of Thai tradition and independence, are three recurring themes in the writings of Buddhist conservatives. Anan Sēnākhan's criticisms of another reformist monk, Phra Phōthirak (Pali: Bodhiraks'a), provide a clear example of the meshing of traditional symbols and values with politics and religious belief. Phōthirak is a monk who, because of disagreement with the authorities of both the Thammayut and Mahānikāy orders, decided in 1975 to establish his own independent monastic order. Anan legalistically notes that under the 1962 Sangha Act promulgated by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat all Thai monks must be associated with and subordinate to one of either the Thammayut, Mahānikāy, Chinese or Vietnamese Buddhist orders which are officially recognised in Thailand. Anan maintains that Phōthirak's break with the official *saṅgha* hierarchies is strictly speaking illegal. But in addition Anan accuses that Phōthirak's actions are, "Equivalent to being in rebellion to the land."(T)[72] Anan makes this claim because Phōthirak rejects the authority of the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai

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[70] **Bunmī** Méthāngkūn, "Phiksu Phū Thamlāy Phutthasāsanā" ("ภิกษุผู้ทำลายพุทธศาสนา"), p.94.

[71] id., *Tō Thān Phutthathāt Rȳang Cit-wāng - Lem 1.* ("โต้ท่านพุทธทาสเรื่องจิตว่าง – เล่ม 1"), p.48.

[72] **Anan** Sēnākhan, *Phōthirak - Sātsadā Mahāphay* ("โพธิรักษ์ – ศาสดามหาภัย" *Bodhiraks'a - The Highly Dangerous Prophet*), Niwat Sīsathāphorn (นิวัฒน์ ศรีสถาพร), Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.118.

sangha, whose status and position are conferred by the King in his role as sàsanùpathamphɔk (ศาสนูปถัมภก) or upholder of the faith. Thus in rejecting the authority of the King, who is also the secular head of the nation, Anan maintains that Phòthirak is strictly speaking in rebellion to the highest symbol of political authority in the land. Accusations of this type are taken seriously and have considerable force in some conservative circles.

However, the criticisms of reformist monks such as Buddhadàsa and Phòthirak, who are regarded as, "Abandoning traditions which are good and which have existed from ancient times."(T)[73], also transcends politics **per se**. The conflict is also over the character of Buddhism. For Buddhist conservatives Buddhism is the key social institution of Thailand, the basis of Thai society and social order. For Buddhadàsa, on the other hand, Buddhism is first and foremost a doctrine of personal salvation. That is, the conflict between traditionalist and reformist Buddhists is at one level a conflict between an individualistic and a social or institutional view of the religion. If as Anan proposes the institutional character of Buddhism is of primary importance then it follows that all the things that maintain the solidarity of that institution in society are also of paramount importance. Conformity to defined goals and traditional sources of unity, such as the power of the state and the symbol of the monarchy, will rank above innovation and reform, which may well threaten solidarity and unity. But if Buddhism is, as Buddhadàsa views it, a doctrine of personal salvation then the pressure to conform to traditional beliefs and practices may well be in contradiction with the individual's spiritual quest for enlightenment.

This debate is strictly speaking outside of religion because it is unable to be resolved by a purely religious debate or by reference to the Buddhist scriptures. As has already been seen the Theravàda scriptures are ambiguous and contain conflicting elements and tendencies which, when taken alone, can be used to justify either Buddhadàsa's individualistic and doctrinal interpretation or the more popular, institutional perspective of Anan and other conservatives. As already noted, sections of the Buddhist scriptures appear to unequivocably treat heaven, hell, spirits and other supernatural phenomena as real states and real beings while other sections appear to reject such supernatural beliefs. Ling observes that historically Buddhism has exhibited a spirit of tolerance towards belief, "in the many supernatural beings who are respected, venerated, propitiated or worshipped by the mass of the common

[73] ibid. p.96.

people."[74] Thus from a purely historical perspective Buddhadāsa's critique of such beliefs which underpin Buddhism as a popular, cultural institution is uncharacteristically puritanical. Nevertheless, in contrast to this general tolerance towards lay beliefs Ling also notes that the Buddha specifically forbids monks to be involved in supernatural activities. Citing a *Vinaya* text Ling notes the following injunction of the Buddha,

> You are not, O *bhikkhus*, to learn or teach the low arts [lit. "brutish wisdom"] of divination, spells, omens, astrology, sacrifices to gods, witchcraft and quackery.[75]

Theravāda Buddhist doctrine is open to widely varying readings and can be manipulated to support widely divergent spiritual and social positions. For this reason it is difficult to evaluate Buddhadāsa's reformed interpretation of Theravāda doctrine simply in terms of his faithfulness to Buddhist teachings or to the canonical texts. When viewed theoretically or doctrinally one can validly conclude that despite his numerous inconsistencies of detail Buddhadāsa has by and large succeeded in creating an important and innovative reading of the Pali canon which is broadly consistent both with the texts he accepts as authoritative and with modernist intellectual expectations. But when viewed politically or sociologically one can just as easily conclude that Buddhadāsa is an idealist who, in rejecting popular beliefs, fails to appreciate the importance of institutional Buddhism to the Thai populace, whether farmers, labourers, administrators or generals. The criticisms of conservative Buddhists like Anan Sēnākhan and Bunmī Mēthāngkūn can be taken as an indicator of Buddhadāsa's failure to develop a popularly acceptable reform of Theravāda Buddhism.

At the same time, however, Buddhadāsa's work is regarded as having great social and religious significance by the small section of modernist Thai Buddhists in the new bourgeois. For example, in a statistical survey of the religious beliefs of 284 Thai academics at five state universities David Gosling found that only 25% believed in the reality of rebirth and most expressed no opinion on the reality or unreality of other Buddhist doctrines such as *nibbāna* and *kamma*. However, the majority regarded the principle of impermanence, *anicca*, to be in substantial agreement with science and regarded it as being compatible with a doctrinalist interpretation of Buddhism. Significantly, Gosling reports that,

[74] Trevor Ling, *The Buddha - Buddhist Civilisation in India and Ceylon*, Temple Smith, London, 1973, p.74.

[75] ibid. p.70

> between 30% and 70% of the questionnaire respondents at Chulalongkorn, Mahidol and Chiengmai Univerisities and Payap College [respecitvely] mentioned Putatat [i.e. Buddhadâsa] on the questionnaire.[76]

Gosling notes that the correspondents usually mentioned Buddhadâsa approvingly on their questionnaire sheets, especially in the context of supporting his interpretation of rebirth as a psychological phenomenon occurring in this life rather than as denoting literal rebirth. Gosling's conclusions show that the Thai scientists he interviewed do indeed hold very similar views on Buddhism and Buddhist doctrine to Buddhadâsa,

> Very few respondents had any desire to reject Buddhism, and as has already been pointed out, the rejection of rebirth as a literal statement of what happens at and beyond death often went hand in hand with a dynamic this-worldly interpretation of the cardinal Buddhist doctrines.[77]

There are therefore multiple levels at which Buddhadâsa's re-interpretations of Theravâda doctrine can be criticised. Firstly, his denial of the authority of the *Abhidhamma* and of the reality of spirits and rebirth is a direct threat to those whose interpretation of Buddhism, and whose books, classes and investments in teaching Buddhism, are founded on precisely those scriptures and teachings. Secondly, the contradiction between Buddhadâsa's desire to interpret Buddhism as a religion of the here and now and the scriptural and doctrinal emphasis on the reality and importance of rebirth creates distinct theoretical tensions in his work. Buddhadâsa's novel views and doctrinalism and his emphasis on individual salvation as opposed to the traditional institutional role of Buddhism in Thai society also cuts across and opposes what most Thais regard their religion to be. But despite these theoretical and socio-political difficulties in Buddhadâsa's work it is nevertheless still the case that among progressive Thai Buddhists he is one of the most popular and respected academic monks in modern Thailand. This is not simply because of his demythologisation of Buddhism. Buddhadâsa also commands the respect of intellectual Buddhists because the view of Buddhist practice that he develops upon the base of his phâsâ-tham method provides access for laypeople to the spiritual core of the religion, from which they have historically been isolated. In Chapters Five and Six Buddhadâsa's re-interpreted Buddhist soteriology, based on his notion of cit-wâng or "freed-mind", is detailed and his attempted abolition of the theoretical distinction between the monk and the layperson is analysed.

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[76] David Gosling, "The Scientific and Religious Beliefs of Thai Scientists and Their Inter-relationship", in *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol.4 No.1, 1975, p.10.

[77] ibid. p.11.

CHAPTER 5

CIT-WANG AND BUDDHADASA'S THEORETICAL ABOLITION OF THE MONK-LAY DISTINCTION.

While each is doctrinally and theoretically significant in itself, the interpretative theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham, the demythologisation of Buddhist metaphysics and supernaturalism, and the rejection of traditionally respected scriptures are in fact jointly the foundations of Buddhadāsa's total re-interpretative system. Together these doctrinal innovations and criticisms provide the tools Buddhadāsa requires to reform both the doctrine and the practice of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand in order to give contemporary relevance to the religion. The various details of his reviews of doctrine and the criticisms of traditional accounts of Buddhist teachings are all elements of his general programme of reform, which has as its goal the abolition of the historical distinction between the Buddhism of the monk, *lokuttaradhamma*, and the Buddhism of the laity, *lokiyadhamma*.

As noted in Chapter Three Buddhadāsa is highly critical of what he regards as the superstitious and supernaturalist character of popular Thai Buddhism, arguing for a return to doctrinal basics as interpreted in terms of their relevance to the immediate experience of life on earth here and now. However, those features of Buddhism which Buddhadāsa rejects as superstitious have traditionally been the dominant and often the most important aspects of the religion of the Buddhist layperson. Concern with Buddhist doctrine **per se** has in general characterised only the clerical religion of the monks. Therefore if the Buddhist laity are not to be excluded from Buddhadāsa's system he must incorporate them within his doctrinal view of Buddhism. But given that laypeople cannot be expected to relinquish their involvement in social affairs and, furthermore, that Buddhadāsa rejects the traditional world-oriented lay or *lokiya* path, the only way he can in fact incorporate the layperson within his doctrinally purified system of Buddhism is by making the traditional clerical, transcendent and doctrinal view of salvation compatible with the mundane life and commitments of the laity. Indeed, the integration of the active, socially involved role of the layperson with a rationalist and strictly doctrinal interpretation of Buddhist teachings is in fact a major focus of

Buddhadāsa's work. The theory of phāsā-tham and the rejection of the supernaturalism and otherworldly focus of the *Abhidhamma* and the *Visuddhimagga* are simply the methodological and critical levers which he uses to effect a fundamental restructuring of the entire edifice of Theravāda Buddhist thought and practice.

The various issues Buddhadāsa directs his attention to can all be seen as either laying a new foundation for approaches to Theravāda doctrine or as being aspects of the systematic reconstruction of Theravāda teaching upon that new foundation. Buddhadāsa's effort to theoretically reconstruct Theravāda Buddhism itself can also be divided into two aspects. Firstly, in integrating the world-involved lay role with doctrinal Buddhism Buddhadāsa is concerned with undermining the validity of popular, supernatural Buddhism, and with preventing any regression or retreat to the shelter of traditional religious beliefs. This critical moment of Buddhadāsa's work has been the focus of the previous two chapters. Secondly, he is concerned to give authentic religious value to the lay role, to world involvement and to the social and material world itself. This systematic sanctification of the social and material world, or *loka*, which in doctrinal Buddhism has traditionally been regarded as the very antithesis of spirituality, will be systematically and thoroughly discussed in the remaining chapters.

Discussion in this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the theoretical pivot upon which Buddhadāsa attempts his monumental reconstructive effort of integrating the world, *loka*, with the core of Buddhist soteriological teachings concerning *nibbāna*. This pivot is a special interpretation of the notion of *anattā* or "non-self", which Buddhadāsa calls in Thai cit-wāng or "voided mind". Buddhadāsa defines "voided mind" as being the base or foundation of *nibbāna*, salvation. However, unlike traditional interpretations of *nibbāna*, which define Buddhist salvation as an inherently transcendent condition attained by radically breaking from the snares of world involvement, Buddhadāsa maintains that cit-wāng is rooted in the everyday experience of mental calm and peace available to all, whether monk or layperson. He maintains that there is a fundamental continuity between ordinary mental peace or cit-wāng and the absolute impertable peace of *nibbāna*. This notion of cit-wāng is the most important positive concept in Buddhadāsa's system.

5.1 Cit-wāng and *Suññatā* - Buddhadāsa's Interpretation of *Anattā*.

The term cit-wāng is Buddhadāsa's rendering into Thai of the Pali term *suññatā* (Sanskrit: *s'ūnyatā*)[1], literally "voidness" or "emptiness", and the Thai term can be literally translated as "void-mind". However, caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the term cit-wāng because there are two quite different but related aspects to the notion of "void" or *suñña*[2] in Theravāda thought. Firstly, *suññatā* is used in reference to the doctrine of *anattā* to denote the non-substantial, phenomenal character of reality; the fundamental void underlying being. *Suññatā* also has a second ethical import of being, "devoid of lusts, evil dispositions and *karma*."[3]

The following passage from the *Visuddhimagga* exemplifies the first sense of *suññatā* noted above, showing the relationship between the notion of "void" or *suñña* and the doctrine of the absence of any self, *anattā*, in either the subjects or objects of consciousness.

> In the ultimate sense all the truths [i.e. *ariyasacca*] should be understood as void because of the absence of (i) any experiencer, (ii) any doer, (iii) anyone who is extinguished, and (iv) any goer. Hence it is said:
>
> "For there is suffering but none who suffers;
> Doing exists although there is no doer;
> Extinguished is but no extinguished person;
> Although there is a path there is no goer."[4]

In the Theravāda tradition the term *suññatā* has most commonly been used to denote the notion of *anattā* as applied to the external world, that is, to denote the notion of the non-substantiality of the objects in the external world. This attribution of non-substantiality or the absence of an essence to the objects in the world is commonly called the voidness or emptiness of the world, as in the following

[1]In the Thai language version of the *Suttapiṭaka* (*Phra Traipidok Phāsā Thai Chabap Lūang*) *suññatā* is systematically translated as wāng, or more commonly as the abstract noun khwām-wāng, "voidness". The specific term cit-wāng has been coined by Buddhadāsa and is unique to his writings and the writings of his followers. While used technically to denote "void" the Thai term wāng also has the sense of "to be devoid of" or "to be free of". It is also used to denote "being free" in the sense of not being busy, the term welā-wāng meaning literally "free time". The term cit-wāng thus literally means "void-mind", but because of the particular thrust of Buddhadāsa's use of the term this literal translation is misleading. I prefer the terms "voided-mind" or "freed-mind", which more accurately catch the sense of Buddhadāsa's term, denoting a mind which is voided of or freed from moral impurities. Cit-wāng most definitely does not mean an "empty mind" in the sense of a mental vacuum or void.

[2]*Suñña*, "void" is the adjectival form while the term *suññatā* is an abstract noun, i.e. "voidness". The Sanskrit equivalents are *s'ūnya* and *s'ūnyatā*.

[3]**Pali Text Society**, *Pali English Dictionary*, T.W. Rhys Davids & William Stede (eds), Luzac & Co. Ltd, London, 1976, p.717.

[4]**Visuddhimagga**, XVI, 90.

passage from the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, "Because of being void of self or of things due to a self it is consequently said that the world is void."(T)[5] The term *anattā* on the other hand, while denoting the general notion of non-substantiality applicable both to the subject of consciousness and to the objects of consciousness, is also used in the more specific sense of the absence of any permanent subject, soul or spirit (i.e. "non-self").

The second sense of *suññatā* is, as noted, to be devoid of moral impurities, which in Buddhist thought is regarded as being in a state of mental equilibrium or equipoise, *upekkhā*, wherein one is neither attracted to nor repelled by anyone or anything. While the traditional emphasis in Theravāda Buddhism has been on the first sense of *suññatā* described above, as denoting *anattā* or "non-self" in the objects of the world, it is the second sense (i.e. to be devoid of "lusts") which is most emphasised by Buddhadāsa in his notion of cit-wāng. Buddhadāsa's primary emphasis in his interpretation of the notion of *anattā* is not upon the absence of an entitative self or soul, "non-self", but upon the mental attitude of non-self-centredness or selflessness. The former interpretation of *anattā* is not absent from Buddhadāsa's writings but it is significantly underplayed. His justification for this ethical emphasis in the interpretation of *anattā* and cit-wāng is pragmatic,

> The interpretation of *anattā* and *attā* has never been fully beneficial. They must be re-interpreted to be fully beneficial and useful for everyone in restraining suffering.(T)[6]

That is, Buddhadāsa maintains that the traditional emphasis of interpretations of *anattā* as denoting the absence of an ontological essence or self to phenomena has not realised the full benefits or utility of the notion in practical efforts to attain the Buddhist goal of ending suffering. His re-interpretative approach here is once again revealed as doctrinalist rather than strictly scriptural, because he measures the value of interpretations of the notion of *anattā* against a general principle of doctrine, the ending of suffering, rather than against any specific scriptural reference to *anattā* as such. Buddhadāsa regards his interpretation of *attā* as denoting "self-centredness" and *anattā* as denoting "non-self-centredness" as being more beneficial to the soteriological goal of ending human suffering.

However, Rājavaramuni indicates that there is in fact an integral relation between the ontological interpretation of *anattā* as "non-self" and the ethical notion

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[5] *Mogharāja Māṇavakapaṇhāniddesa*, *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Vol.30/verse505/p.197.

[6] Phutthathāt, *Dūang Tā Thī Hen Tham*, ("ดวงตาที่เห็นธรรม"), p.14.

of non-self-centredness which is emphasised by Buddhadāsa. He describes *suññatā-vimokkha*, which denotes a process of attaining liberation through concentration on *anattā*, which effects salvation by, "seeing *anattā* and then being able to withdraw attachment and clinging."(T)[7] That is, when it is realised that there is no self in either oneself or in the objects of desire there also arises the awareness that there is nothing which can be clung to or desired, and an attitude of non-attachment and non-self-centredness is developed.

Buddhadāsa renders the term *attā*, "self' or "selfhood" into Thai by the compound term tua-kū - khōrng-kū (ตัวกู – ของกู) "I"-"mine"[8] and says that realising the truth of *anattā* is equivalent to ending the self-centred view that there is an "I" and that there are things which are "mine", "Don't identify as 'I' or 'mine'; act with clear awareness and there will be no suffering."[9] For Buddhadāsa it is the false view that there is an "I" which is able to have and to possess objects of desire as being "mine" which is at the root of emotional attachment. According to the doctrine of *anicca* the desiring of impermanent things in the long run can only lead to the "I" or desirer suffering the loss of those things. Thus, in accord with Buddhist teaching, ending identification as an "I" or self is essential for liberation from suffering. When there is no longer any sense of "I" there is correspondingly no posessive sense of "mine", and so both clinging and its concomitant suffering are ended.

For Buddhadāsa cit-wāng denotes having a mind, cit (จิต), which is free, wāng (ว่าง), from the possessive and deluded atttitude of "I"-"mine". That is,

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[7](Phra) **Rātchaworamunī**, *Photcanānukrom Phutthasāt* ("พจนานุกรมพุทธศาสตร์" *A Dictionary of Buddhism*), Krom Kān-sāsanā Krasūang Syksāthikān (กรมการศาสนา กระทรวงศึกษาธิการ), Bangkok, 2520 (1977), p.133.

[8]Thai possesses an elaborate pronoun system in which the choice of first, second and third person pronouns varies depending on the relative statuses of the speakers or persons spoken about. The first person pronoun kū (กู) is used either derogatorily, as when expressing anger or disgust, or as an intimate form among close friends or relatives. Here Buddhadāsa is using kū in its first, derogatory sense, to emphasise the delusory and false nature of the belief in the existence of a self. Had he wished to emphasise the associations of intimacy attached to the term kū Buddhadāsa would have chose a much less ambiguously intimate first person pronoun such as chan (ฉัน). The English translation of tua-kū - khōrng-kū as "I"-"mine", while being the closest possible rendering, fails to catch the emphatic sense of disapproval associated with Buddhadāsa's vernacular Thai rendering of the Pali term *attā*.

[9]**Buddhadāsa**, *Another Kind of Birth*, p.15.

cit-wāng denotes a mind in ethical equilibrium which is free of disturbing moral stains or hindrances to salvation. Cit-wāng, "freed-mind", is therefore as much an ethical as a psychological notion, denoting the state of mind which should be established if one is to attain *nibbāna*. The following passage, called "Eating the Food of 'Freedness'", is a description of living in the condition of cit-wāng, devoid of "I" and "mine",

> Both the thing that eats and thing that is eaten are "freed-ness" [khwām-wāng ความว่าง], are "freed-things" [khērng-wāng ของว่าง]. He who eats thus is "freed" [wāng ว่าง] because he is neither a being nor an individual. The thing which is eaten is a "freed-thing", or simply the natural elements.(T)[10]

This "freed-ness" or *suññatā*, i.e. the state of being wāng or "voided" of moral impurities and delusions of self-hood, is in no sense an ontological void. What is "voided" is simply the self-centred attitude of "I"-"mine". In the above-quoted passage Buddhadāsa indicates that the cit-wāng attitude to eating should not be that "'I' am eating this food", but rather that, "The elements which are this individual are eating the elements which are this food."(T)[11] He makes the psychological and ethical character of cit-wāng clear in the following statement,

> Mental emptiness [sic][12] is the state in which all the objects of the physical world are present [and being perceived] as usual, but none of them is being grasped or clung to as "mine".[13]

Thus cit-wāng is not a vacuous mental state. It is not,

> "void" of content. All objects are there as usual and the thinking processes are going on as usual, but they are not going the way of grasping and clinging with the idea of "I" and "mine".[14]

Buddhadāsa defines cit-wāng as a condition in which, "one does not cling to anything, is not anything, does not feel that one gets anything or that one gets to

[10] Phutthathāt, *Khwām Suk Thāe Mī Yū Tāe Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), pp.134-135.

[11] ibid. p.138.

[12] As noted previously I disagree with the translation of wāng as "empty" or "emptiness" because it misleadingly implies that cit-wāng is a state of mental vacuity. However, where others have used the term "empty" in translating Buddhadāsa's work, as here, I retain the term for the sake of faithfulness to the cited text.

[13] Buddhadāsa, *Another Kind of Birth*, p.6.

[14] ibid. pp.6-7.

be anything."(T)[15] When the mind is freed it is, "free from suffering, free from dogmatic clinging and attachment."(T)[16]

Because the Buddhist notion of "world", *loka*, in conformity with the doctrine of *anattà*, is often described in the scriptures as being "voidness" or *suññatà*, the notion of *suññatà* (Thai: wàng) has often been misinterpreted as denoting a literal void or vacuum. Buddhadàsa continues the tradition of describing not only the mind but also the world as being wàng, but it should be kept in mind that by this he means that the world is "freed" or "voided" of moral defilements, not that it is a literal "emptiness",

> The Lord Buddha said, *"suññato evekhassu mogharàja sadà sato"* - "One should be a person with mindfulness, always seeing the world in the condition of being a freed thing (khwàm-wàng)." ... Whoever sees the world in the condition of being a freed-thing will not have suffering because they will see it [the world] as something completely without birth and extinction, and so there cannot be suffering.(T)[17]

In interpreting the expression, "the world is *suññatà*", one must be careful to remember that in Buddhist thought the notion of "world", *loka*, does not denote an objective thing totally independent of consciousness, although Buddhism does not deny that there is in fact an external world. Rather, in Buddhism the "world" is always conceived in terms of its relation to human experience and desires. There may well be an external world independent of and beyond human ken but insofar as it is external to human experience such a world is, according to Buddhist teachings, irelevant to any human concerns or interests. The Buddhist "world", *loka*, is that part of the external cosmos which can be perceived and which can therefore become an object of human sense-based desire. Sunthorn Na-Rangsi says,

> The existence of the world according to Buddhism is nothing apart from the existence of sentient beings and vice versa ... When a man is no more in the world, the world is no more for him.[18]

Therefore when Buddhadàsa calls the world a "freed-thing" he does not mean

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[15] **Phutthathāt**, *Withī Fyk Samāthi-wipatsanā - Lem* 1 ("วิธีฝึกสมาธิวิปัสสนา, เล่ม" *The Method of Practising Samādhi-Vipassanā - Book* 1), Samnak-phim Phutthasān (สำนักพิมพ์ พุทธศาสน์), Bangkok, no publication date given, p.78.

[16] **Phutthathāt**, *Cut-māy Khōrng Kān-syksā* ("จุดหมายของการศึกษา" *The Goals of Education*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2522 (1979), p.83.

[17] id., *Thalāēngkān Sūan Mōk* 50 *Pī* ("แถลงการณ์สวนโมกข์ 50 ปี"), p.29.

[18] **Na-Rangsi**, p.68.

that it is a literal void but that it is a realm of experience freed of clinging and so of suffering. A "freed-world" is one no longer clung to or craved for. Buddhadāsa makes this clear when he says,

> The *suññatā* of the Buddha means the absence of anything that we might have a right to grasp at and cling to as an abiding entity or self ... The world is described as empty because there is nothing whatever that we might have a right to grasp at. We must cope with an empty world, with a mind that does not cling.[19]

Thus Buddhadāsa's description of the world as a "freed-thing" is in no sense a comment on the actual character of the external world but rather is an injunction regarding the non-attached state of mind which should be brought to bear in all relations with the world in order to attain salvation from suffering.

5.2 Cit-wāng as the Fundamental Condition of Mind.

Following on from his wish to interpret *anattā* "beneficially", that is, to make doctrinal Buddhism accessible to and of benefit to the layperson as well as to the monk, Buddhadāsa avoids defining cit-wāng as a condition attained only as the culmination of a rigorous system of spiritual practices undertaken in isolation from the world, as Buddhist salvation has traditionally been interpreted. Rather he considers cit-wāng to be the fundamental condition of mind as such,

> I consider a mind freed from *kilesa* to be fundamental ... Normally the mind is fundamentally free from *kilesa*: hence our only [spiritual] duty is to wait and block their way with mindful wisdom. Don't give them [*kilesa*] the chance to arise. Let there continually be the freedness of the fundamental, original freed-mind.(T)[20]

Here Buddhadāsa states that the mental impurities or *kilesa*[21] which bar the way to salvation have no essential existence but like all other things exist dependently. The condition which permits *kilesa* to arise and pollute the mind is the absence of mindfulness or *sati*. *Sati* denotes self-watchfulness, which is essentially to distance or detach oneself from one's thoughts and actions and so attain mental and moral equilibrium. *Sati* or mindfulness is the basic Theravāda meditative practice, usually developed by the practice of observing and concentrating on the breath. On this Buddhadāsa advises,

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[19]**Buddhadāsa**, *Buddha-dhamma For Students*, p.64.

[20]**Phutthathāt**, *Khwām-suk Thǣ Mī Yū Tǣ Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), p.37.

[21]Traditionally ten *kilesa* or defilements are enumerated: (1) *lobha* - greed, (2) *dosa* - hatred, (3) *moha* - delusion, (4) *māna* - conceit, (5) *diṭṭhi* - false views, (6) *vicikicchā* - scepticism and doubt, (7) *thīna* mental torpor, (8) *uddhacca* - mental restlessness, (9) *ahirika* - shamelessness, (10) *anottappa* - lack of a conscience or moral dread.

> Having mindfulness is to wait and be cautious with every inward and outward breath. Don't get lost in attached clinging, to having, taking and being.(T)[22]

When one lacks mindfulness one ignorantly identifies with one's thoughts and actions, which in turn is regarded as giving rise to mentally disturbing *kilesa*. But *kilesa* do not have to be dug out or extricated from the mind because according to Buddhadāsa they have no essential character. Thus to try to get rid of *kilesa* by actively suppressing them is to mistakenly regard them as having some positive or essential character. In Buddhadāsa's system *kilesa* are not to be removed but, rather, prevented from developing by remaining mindful and so not allowing their necessary preconditons to arise. This interpretation of cit-wāng is important to Buddhadāsa's re-interpretative effort because it means that the human mind is fundamentally pure, not impure or defiled. Thus given that he defines cit-wāng as the basis of attaining *nibbāna* it means that all that is required to begin working for *nibbāna* is to remain "mindful" and prevent the mind's original purity from being defiled. This is a much more accessible practice for attaining *nibbāna* than the traditional complex system of Buddhist meditation. In other words, Buddhadāsa's interpretation of cit-wāng as denoting both the fundamental condition of mind and the foundation of *nibbāna* radically simplifies traditional Buddhist soteriological practices, making them much more accessible to the layperson.

However, this interpretation of cit-wāng has attracted considerable criticism. Bunmi Mēthāngkūn, for example, has theoretical objections to Buddhadāsa's contention that cit-wāng, a pure mind completely free of any moral stains or impurities, is the fundamental condition of mind. Bunmi observes that,

> There are *anusayakilesa*, that is, a fine kind of *kilesa* which hide, completely obscured inside the mind, and which no-one anywhere can comprehend."(T)[23]

In Buddhist doctrine *anusaya* are regarded as latent or subconscious morally unwholesome (*akusala*) proclivities or dispositions which underlie the cognisable expressions of *kilesa*[24]. The following passages from the *Visuddhimagga* reveal the non-conscious nature of *anusaya* and their fundamental role in perpetuating the clinging which creates *kamma* and which leads to rebirth,

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[22]**Phutthathāt**, *Withī Fyk Samāthi-wipatsanā - Lem* 1 ("วิธีฝึกสมาธิวิปัสสนา, เล่ม1", p.85.

[23]**Bunmī** Mēthāngkūn, *Tō Thān Phutthathāt Rȳang Cit-wāng - Lem* 1 ("โต้ท่านพุทธทาสเรื่องจิตว่าง – เล่ม 1"), p.68.

[24]Traditionally seven *anusaya* or *anusayakilesa* are listed: (1) *kāma-rāga* - sensuous greed, (2) *paṭigha* - grudge, (3) *diṭṭhi* - false views, (4) *vicikicchā* - skepticism and doubt, (5) *māna* - conceit, (6) *bhava-rāga* - craving for continued existence, (7) *avijjā* - ignorance.

> The defilements [*anusayakilesa*] that are the roots of the round [of rebirth] are inherent in one's own aggregates [*khandhas*] not fully understood by insight from the instant those aggregates arise.[25]

Elsewhere in the *Visuddhimagga* it is said,

> These things are called proclivities [*anusaya*] since, in consequence of their pertinacity, they ever and again tend to become the conditions for the arising of ever new sensuous greed [*kāma-rāga*], etc.[26]

These passages suggest, in contradistinction with Buddhadāsa's contention that the mind is fundamentally pure, that moral impurities are in some sense inherent in the factors or *khandhas* from which mind is constituted. Bunmi claims that <u>cit-wāng</u> cannot be the basis of *nibbāna* because even when the mind is free of explicit *kilesa* (i.e. Buddhadāsa's definition of <u>cit-wāng</u>) the implicit or unexpressed *anusaya* or *anusayakilesa* yet remain, potentially capable of becoming manifest and of destroying the mental peace of <u>cit-wāng</u>. Buddhadāsa does not deny that *anusaya* exist, for he claims that <u>cit-wāng</u> is the fundamental conditon of the **conscious** mind. He does not deny that morally unwholseome *kammic* residues may remain subconscious or latent. He invokes the notion of latent *anusaya* when explaining why the *sakidāgāmī*, the enlightened Buddhist saint who is "reborn" only once more before attaining salvation, must yet still take one more "birth",

> *Sakidāgāmī* translates as, "a person who will return once more", meaning that the *sakidāgāmī* already traverses the correct path [towards *nibbāna*] but because of the germs of some kinds of original *kilesa* [i.e. *anusaya*] which remain he still reverts once more to recollecting and missing the condition of living like an average person.(T)[27]

The debate here over whether the mind is fundamentally pure or defiled, and over whether <u>cit-wāng</u> should, as Buddhadāsa maintains, denote only the conscious mind or, as Bunmi holds, include the non-conscious mind, is at root a disagreement over the definition of *nibbāna*. Specifically it is a debate over the degree of mental purity which must be developed before it can said *nibbāna* has in fact been

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[25]**Visuddhimagga**, XXII, 83.

[26]ibid., XXII, 60.

[27] **Phutthathāt**, *Nipphān Phon Samay Pai Lǣw Ry*? "นิพพานพ้นสมัยไปแล้วหรือ?" *Is Nibbāna Old Fashioned?*), Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา) Samutprakan Thailand, 2508 (1965), p.7.

N.b. Buddhadāsa makes it clear in this passage that he does not take the term *sakidāgāmi* to denote a person who is literally reborn once more before attaining *nibbāna*. Rather he takes the term as meaning an enlightened person whose remaining *kamma* forces them to return to the deluded mental condition of an ordinary person.

attained. If, as Bunmi maintains, *nibbàna* is defined as the absence of **all** disturbances or *kilesa*, even including potential *anusaya*, then such a state of mental purity could only be attained after considerable spiritual effort. However, if, as Buddhadàsa holds, *nibbàna* is simply the absence of impurities from the **conscious** mind, i.e. cit-wàng, then Buddhist salvation is not only readily accessible to either the layperson or the monk but it is a mental state that each person experiences whenever they are not particularly angry, hateful or desirous.

5.3 *Nibbàna* as a Universally Accessible Spiritual Goal.

The most important result of Buddhadàsa's defintion of cit-wàng as being the basis of Buddhist salvation is that *nibbàna* is not a transcendent condition attainable only after years, or perhaps lives, spent purging the mind of impurities, but like cit-wàng is the original condition of the mind. In other words, in Buddhadàsa's system *nibbàna* is the mind's characteristic state. *Nibbàna* is the mind's basic condition, an original state of mental equilibrium to be retained or re-attained by remaining mindful and by not allowing the delusions and ignorance of "I"-"mine" to arise.

Buddhadàsa recognises three levels of *nibbàna*. The first level of *nibbàna* is called *tadaṅganibbàna* and is defined as,

> A state that comes about momentarily when external conditions happen, fortuitously, to be such that no idea of "I" or "mine" arises.[28]

That is, *tadaṅganibbàna* denotes the attainment of mental calm because of the influence of a peaceful environment. The second level of *nibbàna* recognised by Buddhadàsa is called *vikhambhananibbàna*, which denotes mental calm attained because of the mental control exercised in *samàdhi* meditation, in which intense concentration arrests or paralyses the arising of *kilesa*. But neither of these two forms of *nibbàna* are regarded as permanent. In the case of *tadaṅganibbàna* any disturbance in the environment would in turn re-effect the disturbing influence of *kilesa* upon the mind. And in the case of *vikhambhananibbàna kilesa* are not in fact abolished but only paralysed from acting by the force of meditative concentration. In contrast to these preliminary forms of *nibbàna* Buddhadàsa calls the highest form of *nibbàna samucchedanibbàna* or *parinibbàna*, which is when mental peace results from the actual ending rather than the simple repression of mind-disturbing *kilesa*. Significantly Buddhadàsa regards *tadaṅganibbàna* and

[28]**Buddhadàsa**, *Another Kind of Birth*, p.8.

vikhambhananibbāna as actual modes of *nibbāna* while his traditionalist opponents regard only *parinibbāna* as true *nibbāna*. That is, Buddhadāsa accepts conscious states of mental peace which may still be underlain by *anusaya* as actual if basic forms of salvation or *nibbāna*. For Buddhadāsa the supreme *parinibbāna* is foreshadowed by the less profound and impermanent but, for him, nevertheless actual *nibbānic* states of *tadaṅganibbāna* and *vikhambhananibbāna*. However, Anan Sēnākhan recognises only a mind totally freed of *anusaya* as potentially having access to *nibbāna* and he is highly critical of Buddhadāsa's broader interpretation,

> Buddhadāsa tries to twist the explanation that the term *nibbāna*, which is the extremely difficult and profound *dhamma*, denotes something that is easy [to attain]. It is as if he holds in contempt the realisation of the Lord Buddha.(T)[29]

In fact, however, Buddhadāsa does not present *nibbāna* as being something easily attained or as part of the mundane world of craving, attachment and ignorance. He acknowledges that *nibbāna* itself is an ineffable condition not able to be adequately described in words or rational concepts,

> This is the difficulty or depth of its [*nibbāna's*] meaning, for the world [of human learning] still lacks any linguistic term to denote a condition which is far, far beyond the world - a condition that is attained by following neither goodness nor evil, neither happiness nor suffering - but which we must yet request to call, in the manner of a supposition, the blessed *nibbāna*.(T)[30]

However, for Buddhadāsa *nibbāna* is not beyond description because it is in fact a condition that is beyond the material world, but rather because, while being based in everyday experience, it still transcends the usual mental world of human beings which is disturbed and clouded by ignorance.

This debate over the definition of *nibbāna* reflects Anan's and Buddhadāsa's widely varying views on the nature of Buddhism as a religion. Anan Sēnākhan supports the preservation of the traditional distinction between the lay and clerical forms of Buddhism and denounces as shallow Buddhadāsa's popularist interpretation of salvation. Buddhadāsa, however, wishes to make the core soteriological aspects of Buddhism relevant and accessible to all Buddhists, whether world-involved laity or renunciate monk. His definition of the lower forms of *nibbāna* as actual conditions of salvation, while to an extent a matter of semantics, reflects his concern to

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[29] Anan Sēnākhan, *Khamsōrn Dīarathī* ("คำสอนเดียรถีย์"), p.41.

[30] Phutthathāt, *Nipphān* ("นิพพาน"), p.46.

emphasise the accessibility of Buddhist practice and salvation to all. He maintains that the layperson who experiences the occasional peaceful bliss of *tadaṅganibbāna* has tasted true salvation, even if only momentarily.

Buddhadāsa also acknowledges the two traditionally recognised types of *parinibbāna*, *sa-upādisesanibbāna* and *anupādisesanibbāna*, defining the former as follows,

> When the five *khandhas* which have been freed of *avijjā* [ignorance] have yet to disperse, and there is still the enjoyment of the taste of *nibbāna*, such a state is called *sa-upādisesanibbāna*.(T)[31]

Sa-upādisesanibbāna, also called *kilesaparinibbāna* or the full extinction of defilements, denotes, "*nibbāna* with the groups of existence [i.e. *khandhas*] still remaining."[32] That is, *sa-upādisesanibbāna* is a condition of salvation traditionally regarded as being attained while alive, when the *khandhas* or constitutive factors of human existence remain to sustain life. *Anupādisesanibbāna*, on the other hand, denotes, "*nibbāna* without the groups [*khandhas*] remaining."[33] *Anupādisesanibbāna* is also called *khandhaparinibbāna* or the full extinction of the *khandhas* which sustain life, and is traditionally regarded as a post-death condition of salvation. Chinda Chandrkaew expresses the traditional Theravāda view of salvation when he says of *sa-upādisesanibbāna* and *anupādisesanibbāna*,

> These are not two different kinds of *nibbāna*; they, in fact, refer to the one and the same *nibbāna* which is given as two according as it is experienced before or after death.[34]

However, Buddhadāsa denies that supreme or *parinibbāna* is only attained upon death, citing the fact of the Buddha's life mission undertaken after his enlightenment,

> The Buddha and all the other *arahants* were completely free of desires, yet succeeded in doing many things far more useful than any of us are capable of ... If the defilements responsible for the desire to be and get things had been completely eliminated what was the force that motivated the Buddha and all the *arahants* to do all this? They were motivated by

[31] ibid., p.28.

[32] Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary - Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, 4th edn, Nyanaponika (rev), Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy Sri Lanka, 1980, pp.128-129.

[33] ibid. p.129.

[34] Chinda Chandrkaew, *Nibbana - The Ultimate Truth of Buddhism*, Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Bangkok, 1982, p.70.

discrimination coupled with goodwill [*mettā*].[35]

In Buddhadāsa's interpretation there is no express relation between *parinibbāna* as a mental state and death, a relation which is implied in the traditional view of *anupādisesanibbāna*. On the contrary, for Buddhadāsa an *arahant* who is *anupādisesa* is not dead but in a state of unperturbable balance beyond the influence of any mentally or morally disturbing influences. This interpretation is supported by the following passage from the *Dhātu Sutta*. In this *sutta* the two types of *nibbāna* are not distinguished in terms of respectively denoting pre-death and post-death conditions of salvation. Rather, *sa-upādisesanibbāna* is described as a condition in which remaining mental impurities, i.e. *anusayakilesa*, may yet cause mental confusion and so attachment and suffering, while *anupādisesanibbāna* is described as a completely unperturbable condition,

> When a *bhikkhu* partakes of mental objects that are both liked and disliked, when he yet partakes of pleasure and pain because the five naturally arising sense organs have not yet decayed and the five senses still remain, behold O *bhikkhus*, the ending of *rāga* [passion], the ending of *dosa* [anger], the ending of *moha* [delusion] of such a *bhikkhu* is what is called *sa-upādisesanibbāna* factor ... When all feelings in the selfhood of a *bhikkhu*, that is, factors born of *kilesa*, or *taṇhā* and so on, cannot cause him to be engrossed [in sense objects] and are extinguished and cooled, behold O *bhikkhus*, this we call *anupādisesanibbāna* factor.(T)[36]

Two issues are at stake in Buddhadāsa's disagreement with the traditional view that *anupādisesanibbāna* is a post-death condition. The first issue has already been raised above and is a matter of defintion related to the question of the accessibility of *nibbāna* to the layperson. Anan Sēnākhan and other Buddhist traditionalists define true *nibbāna* as the supreme condition of salvation or *parinibbāna*, whether *sa-upādisesanibbāna* or *anupādisesanibbāna*. Buddhadāsa on the other hand takes a broader view, including the *tadaṅga* and *vikhambhana* states of *nibbāna* as conditions of true salvation. However, there is also a second theoretical issue involved in this disagreement. Buddhadāsa's and Anan's conflicting interpretations of *nibbāna* also represent alternative views of the actual character of *nibbāna*. In Buddhadāsa's interpretation *nibbāna* is founded upon the everyday exerience of mental calm and, rather than being qualitatively distinct, the higher state of *parinibbāna* is described as being the acme of a single continuum of ever more exalted states of salvation which progressively approach the final condition of

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[35] Buddhadāsa, *Handbook For Mankind*, trans. Buddhanigama, Sublime Life Mission, Bangkok, 1980, p.77.

[36] *Dhātu Sutta, Khuddaka Nikāya*, Vol.25/verse222/p.192.

unperturbable mental equipoise. For Anan, on the other hand, *nibbāna* is intrinsically transcendent and outside of everyday life, being qualitatively distinct from everyday experience.

In Buddhadāsa's system cit-wāng is defined as the immediate precursor of *nibbāna* and he defines both conditons in the same terms, as the absence of "I"-"mine" or self-centredness,

> *Nibbāna* translates as "extinction without remainder", but one may well ask extinction without remainder of what? It is simply the extinction without remainder of "I"-"mine", which is simply the feeling of attached clinging ... That is, the state in which there is nothing to be taken or to be.(T)[37]

That is, Buddhadāsa regards *nibbāna*, like cit-wāng, as being a condition in which there is neither identification, or "being someone", nor possessive attachment, or "taking something". And like cit-wāng Buddhadāsa defines *nibbāna* as the fundamental or natural condition of the mind,

> The blessed *nibbāna* is the destination point of every person. There is an attraction towards the condition of *nibbāna*, or to put it another way the inherent tendency of desire is always towards a naturally existing freedness [khwām-wāng]. But this tendency suffers some kinds of interfering influences, such as the fruits of *kamma*, which retard it and pull it off its natural course.(T)[38]

Buddhadāsa's interpretation of *nibbāna* as being a "natural" goal of every person, which is founded upon the everyday state of mental equilibrium that he calls cit-wāng, is fundamental to his attempt to make Buddhist salvation a universal goal, accessible to all, whatever their life circumstances,

> This is a *nibbāna* in which everyone should be interested. It is a natural matter, something that everyone can understand and do. It is not beyond their ability. *Nibbāna* is a condition of many kinds and levels of calm and we can attain it according to our own ability.(T)[39]

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[37] **Phutthathāt**, *Withī Fyk Samāthi-wipatsanā - Lem* 1 ("วิธีฝึกสมาธิวิปัสสนา, เล่ม1") p.79.

[38] id., *Nipphān* ("นิพพาน"), p.25.

[39] id., *Nipphān Nōrk Khamphī Aphitham* ("นิพพานนอกคัมภีร์อภิธรรม" *Nibbāna Outside the Abhidhamma Scriptures*), Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องคการฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา), Samutprakan Thailand, no publication date given, p.14.

5.4 Buddhadāsa's Theoretical Abolition of the Monk-Lay Distinction.

Buddhadāsa's view of the universal relevance of *nibbāna* contrasts sharply with the traditional Thai view that striving for the ultimate Buddhist salvation, because of its assumed transcendent character, is an activity appropriate only for spiritually advanced monks. Slater summarises this traditional view of *nibbāna*'s inaccessibility to the ordinary person when he notes, "only the saint can experience *nibbāna*, only the saint can know."[40] Buddhadāsa does not deny that one must become a saint or an *arahant* in order to attain salvation, but he does deny that it is first necessary to be a monk in order to become a saint. Commenting on popular Thai views of salvation anthropologist Jane Bunnag observes,

> According to orthodox Theravada doctrine only a monk ... can have any hope of achieving *nirvana*, the layman, or householder who remains firmly rooted in the material world can entertain no such aspirations.[41]

Bunnag also adds that in practice, "few, if any monks [in the Central Thai countryside] consider *nirvana* to be a relevant goal for which to strive."[42] Most monks instead, like laypeople, strive for a better rebirth through meritorious action, *nibbāna* only being regarded as a realistic goal for the most spiritually developed personalities. In the context of criticising Buddhadāsa's view of the universal relevance of *nibbāna* Khukrit Pramot has re-affirmed his support for the traditional Thai distinction between the lay and monastic lifestyles described by Bunnag,

> Buddhism has two grades of *dhamma* which are established on different kinds of truth or *sacca*, and which proceed towards different kinds of goals. They are not the same at all. These two grades of *dhamma* are *lokiyadhamma* [worldly *dhamma*] and *lokuttaradhamma* [supramundane *dhamma*], which are different varieties of *dhamma* that could be called different levels or different compartments. But they are in the same religion and both are the instructions of the Lord Buddha.(T)[43]

Tambiah traces the origin of such views at least as far back as As'oka's North Indian empire in the third century B.C., the first explicitly Buddhist state.

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[40] **Slater**, p.62.

[41] Jane **Bunnag**, "The Role of the Buddhist Monk in Central Thai Society", in *Visakha Puja*, Buddhist Association of Thailand, Bangkok, 2513 (1970), p.48.

[42] ibid.

[43] **Khykrit** Prāmōt (คึกฤทธิ์ ปราโมช), "Khwām-hen Bāng Tōrn Khōrng M.R.W. Khykrit Prāmōt" ("ความเห็นบางตอนของ มรว. คึกฤทธิ์ ป." "Some Views of M.R. Khukrit Pramot"), in Pun Congprasōet *Arai Thūk Arai Phit* ("อะไรถูกอะไรผิด" *What is Correct and What is Wrong*), Ongkān Fyn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา), Bangkok, 2525 (1982) pp.2-3.

Tambiah writes that in the As'okan church-state relationship, which became the model for all subsequent Buddhist polities, it was only within the broader socio-political order that the specialised quest of the "renouncer" or monk who sought *nibbāna* was placed,

> In other words it is within the larger universe of the king and subjects that we should place the *bhikkhu's* regimen and salvation quest as the specially valued and exclusive pursuit of the religious elite - with the layman's duty [being] to support it but not imitate its stringent life.[44]

Although Buddhadāsa believes that attaining the ultimate fruits of Buddhist practice is more difficult for the layperson he is nevertheless still specifically concerned to break down the traditional monk-lay distinction, ascribing the same religious aspirations and hopes to all. Buddhadāsa says that, "an *arahant* [an enlightened Theravāda saint] has transcended monkhood and laity alike."[45] That is, he denies that an enlightened person must of necessity be a monk, saying that an *arahant* is in a condition which is beyond such social distinctions. In fact Buddhadāsa claims that because the life of a layperson has more disturbing problems than the monk's sheltered monastic existence the laity are in greater need of *nibbāna's* quenching of the fires of suffering than are monks (T)[46]. Regarding the practice of *sati* or mindfulness, the basis of maintaining cit-wâng or the "freed-mind" state necessary to attain *nibbāna*, he says that the term "practicer" (khon patibat tham - คนปฏิบัติธรรม) does not refer to,

> those who practise alone in the forest. The people who live at home, who act and work with duties and the burden of whatever responsibilities are all called "practicers". That is, they practise *dhamma*.(T)[47]

However, Buddhadāsa does not seek to abolish the actual roles of monk and layperson but only to place both on an equal spiritual footing, with equal access to the fruits of the path. For example, he proposes that Thais should uphold the ancient tradition of laymen seeking ordination for at least one three month phansā or rainy season retreat during their life,

> Ordaining for three months, which even today many arrange to do, is

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[44] **Tambiah**, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, p.60.

[45] **Buddhadāsa**, *Buddha-dhamma for Students*, p.39.

[46] **Phutthathāt**, *Nipphān Nōrk Khamphī Aphitham* ("นิพพานนอกคัมภีร์อภิธรรม"), p.9.

[47] id., *Khwām-suk Thāe Mī Yū Tāe Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), p.3.

something which should be done and which should be encouraged.(T)[48]

Buddhadāsa says that this practice should be retained to ensure that the religion does not decline, and in order to allow laymen to obtain a better understanding of the principles of Buddhism. Whereas he criticises many other non-canonical practices and beliefs Buddhadāsa says that this particular non-canonical custom of short-term ordination should be retained because of its benefits,

> Even though being ordained for three months is not something that existed in the time of the Buddha if it is done with pure and good intentions it is still something reasonable for collectively holding to and performing the practice [of *dhamma*] into the future.(T)[49]

While opening up access to ultimate salvation from suffering to the layperson Buddhadāsa does not equate the layperson with the monk on all counts. He still maintains that,

> It occurs in the Pali scriptures themselves that the holy life, *brahmacariya*, is not something that the layperson can practise flawlessly well ... because the state of being a layperson has many [worldly] concerns and obstacles.(T)[50]

Because of the limitations of being a layperson Buddhadāsa says, "We still cannot enter into the [meaning of] the religion itself until we have truly led the life of a monk."(T)[51]

He therefore does not propose abolishing the institution or role of the renunciate. What he abolishes is the traditional barrier to lay practice of meditation and related salvation-oriented activities. Buddhadāsa shifts the focus of his critique away from the question of social roles by defining the terms "lay" and "monk" in <u>phāsā-tham</u> as mental states rather than as religious roles,

> Don't take living in a house or a temple as the criterion of being a layperson or a monk. You must consider what is the person's state of mind ... These days those living in a temple may have a mind like one living at home ... a householder may well have a mind like a monk or even an

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[48] id., *Būat Sām Dȳan* ("บวชสามเดือน" *Ordain for Three Months*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.3.

[49] ibid. p.2.

[50] ibid. p.5.

[51] ibid.

ascetic.(T)[52]

By this definition both a monk and a layperson may have the practical experience of living the *dhamma* in the world which Buddhadāsa says is vital to true religious attainment. In Buddhadāsa's phāsā-tham interpretations the terms *lokiya* and *lokuttara*, and their respective traditional associations with being a layperson and a monk, no longer refer to either the institution of the *saṅgha* or to the worldly life. Instead they refer to states of mind which are independent of one's lifestyle or social role, "The *lokuttara* domain denotes a mind which is without 'self', that has neither 'I' nor 'mine'."(T)[53]

While Buddhadāsa's doctrinal reforms are often radical his practice, as already noted in Chapter Two, is highly conservative. For given the importance of correct practice in Theravāda Buddhism Buddhadāsa must remain strictly conservative in practice in order to demonstrate his **bona fide** position as a monk if he wishes his views to have authority and standing within the institution of Thai Buddhism. But also, given that the structure of the Buddhist hierarchy in Thailand is founded upon strict abidance to practices rather than upon any enforced orthodoxy, Buddhadāsa's radical re-interpretations of doctrine do not in themselves constitute a threat to institutional Buddhism. This is despite the fact that his endowing of the layperson with most of the abilities and qualities formerly attributed only to the monk may at first appear to undermine the structure of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, given that Thai Buddhism has traditionally been based upon a qualitiative distinction between the monk and the layperson.

The traditional justification for lay sponsorship and material support of the *saṅgha* in the popular religion has been the belief that giving alms to monks and donations to temples are meritorious acts which lead to the accumulation of good *kamma* and so to a felicitous rebirth. But if according to Buddhadāsa such supernaturalist views of *kamma* and rebirth are to be rejected, and if laypeople themselves possess all the spiritual authority and ability required for their own salvation, then the traditional bases of the *saṅgha*'s support would indeed appear to be threatened. This need not mean anything so disastrous as the utter collapse of the Thai *saṅgha* but if Buddhadāsa's reformist ideas were widely accepted it would mean that the *saṅgha* which did continue would have to have its socio-religious role radically redefined.

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[52] id., *Kharāwāt Tham* ("ฆราวาสธรรม"), p.123.

[53] ibid. p.49.

However, while a radical restructuring of institutional Buddhism would seem a necessary practical consequence of abolishing the essential spiritual distinctions between laity and monks, Buddhadāsa, concerned to uphold the traditional practice of Buddhism which confers religious authority to his re-interpretative work, fails to mention this result in any of his writings. Instead, and in contradiction with the thrust of his theoretical abolition of the monk-lay distinction, he re-affirms the practical retention of these two traditional roles on unrelated, pragmatic grounds. As noted above, Buddhadāsa says that ordaining as a monk ensures the continuation of the religion by giving laymen a first hand knowledge of the Buddha's own renunciate practices and goals. But while he does not recognise, or avoids acknowledging, the potentially disruptive consequences of his ideas for the institution of Buddhism in Thailand Buddhadāsa's conservative critics have focussed their attacks on precisely this point. Bunmī Mēthāngkūn and Anan Sēnākhan accuse Buddhadāsa of seeking to destroy Buddhism, i.e. the *saṅgha*. Bunmī criticises the ending of the traditional monk-lay distinction when he says Buddhadāsa has put forward his teachings in order to, "destroy Buddhism and to have the monks go out to till the fields."(T)[54] However, because his ideas have not until now led to any action which has concretely affected the status or role of the *saṅgha*, Buddhadāsa's doctrinal declericalisation of salvation has not yet met any practical opposition from within the *saṅgha* hierarchy, although individual monks have severely attacked his views.

5.5 Debate on the *Lokiyadhamma - Lokuttaradhamma* Distinction.

In a handbill attacking Buddhadāsa's notion of <u>cit-wāng</u> Phra Kittiwutthō[55] cites the traditional canonical basis for the distincton between the worldly and the supramundane paths in the *Dhammadinna Sutta*[56]. Kittiwutthō claims that Buddhadāsa's rejection of the traditional *lokiya-lokuttara* distinction contradicts the teachings of the Buddha in the *Suttapiṭaka*. In the *Dhammadinna Sutta* a layman,

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[54]**Bunmī** Mēthāngkūn, "Phiksu Phū Thamlāy Phutthasātsanā" ("ภิกษุผู้ทำลายพุทธศาสนา"), p.94.

[55](Phra) **Kittiwutthō Phikkhu,** "Rȳang Cit-wāng Nōrk Phra Traipidok Mī Khwām Samkhan Nai Patcuban Māk" ("เรื่องจิตว่างนอกพระไตรปิฎกมีความสำคัญในปัจจุบันมาก" "Concerning Cit-wāng as Being Outside [the Teachings Contained in] the *Tipiṭaka* Having Great Contemporary Importance"), in Pun Congprasōet (ed), *Arai Thūk Arai Phit* ("อะไรถูกอะไรผิด" *What is Correct and What is Wrong*), Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā, Bangkok, 2525 (1982), pp.126-130.

[56]*Dhammadinna Sutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya*, Vol.19/verses1625-1626/pp.404-405.

Dhammadinna, asks the Buddha to describe the way to happiness and well-being. The Buddha replies that the best and most expeditious path to well-being or *nibbāna* is to study and put into practice the "profound teaching of the Tathāgata on the voidness (*suññatā*) of *lokuttara*", an injuction which Buddhadāsa equates with abiding by cit-wāng. However, Dhammadinna responds that it is too difficult for a layperson to appreciate and enter into the profundity of the Buddha's teaching of *suññatā* and asks to be instructed in the *dhamma* in a way appropriate for a layperson like himself who is already established in Buddhist moral practice. The Buddha then provides an alternative instruction, the *sotāpattiyaṅga* or four "limbs" or aspects of spiritual practice which lead one into the stream, *sotāpatti*, that flows towards *nibbāna*. These four limbs are defined as: (1) faith in the Buddha, (2) the *dhamma* and (3) the *saṅgha*, as well as (4) abiding by the *sīlas* or moral practices for the purpose of developing *samādhi*. When Dhammadinna says that he and his retinue are already established in these four *sotāpattiyaṅgas* the Buddha replies that they have then attained the fruit of *sotāpatti*, i.e. they have enterred the stream that flows towards *nibbāna*.

The four *sotāpattiyaṅgas* have traditionally been regarded as the bases of *lokiyadhamma* or the layperson's practice, whose goal is not *nibbānic* salvation but a felicitous rebirth. The above *sutta* has also traditionally been interpreted as meaning that the practice of *suññatā* is too difficult for the layperson and that the higher or more expeditious path to salvation is open only to the monk. It is also correspondingly taken to mean that following the most expeditious path to salvation requires complete renunciation of *lokiya* concerns in the socio-cultural world, whose influences are regarded as retarding or obstructing the attainment of *nibbāna*.

However, in talking of the same *sutta* Buddhadāsa claims that in providing a practically more accessible path for the layperson the Buddha has not thereby given up the goal of *nibbāna* as being appropriate for the laity. He claims the four *sotāpattiyaṅgas* given by the Buddha to Dhammadinna are not *lokiyadhamma* in the above sense but rather are full-fledged aspects of the path that leads to *nibbāna*. This is because he maintains that the very term *sotāpatti* or "enterring the stream" implies the beginning of the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path or *ariyamagga* whose culmination is not worldly success but *nibbāna*. In the actual *Dhammadinna Sutta* the Buddha in fact says nothing about the *sotāpattiyaṅga* being a different *lokiya* path, the term *lokiya* is not even mentioned in this context, and so the popular interpretation of this *sutta* referred to by Kittiwutthō in criticising Buddhadāsa in fact has no immediate scriptural basis.

My own interpretation of this *sutta* is that when he initially advises

Dhammadinna to study and put into practice the teaching of the "voidness of *lokuttara*", the Buddha is referring to the higher *jhānic* meditations on nothingness which are described elsewhere in the *Suttapiṭaka* as a means of penetrating to an enlightening insight into reality. *Suññatā*, the voidness of existence or the absence of a permanent centre to any of the impermanent objects of experience, is also one object of Buddhist *samādhi* meditation, whose practical goal is to decrease attachment by apprehending all things in terms of their constitutive elements rather than as entities. This practice is described in detail by the Buddha in the *Cuḷasuññatā Sutta*[57]. But when Dhammadinna rejects this elaborate meditative system and the Buddha proposes following the *sotāpattiyaṅga* for the purpose of developing *samādhi*, I suggest that the Buddha may in fact be referring to *upacāra samādhi* or "access concentration", the type of meditative reflectiveness required for insight or *vipassanā* meditation. These two types of meditation, *samādhi* and *vipassanā* are discussed further in the next chapter. However, it should be noted here that both are traditionally considered capable of leading to *nibbāna*.

If my interpretation is correct it would mean that the four *sotāpattiyaṅga* do not represent a separate *lokiya* path for the layperson, which promotes a happy rebirth but not the attainment of *nibbāna*. Rather, they would represent a separate point of entry into the same path or stream towards *nibbāna* which contemplative monks attain by means of their more abstract *jhānic* or *samādhi* meditations. Although Buddhadāsa does not present this interpretation, it is consistent with his view that the *Dhammadinna Sutta* does not provide a justification for a separate *lokiya* path for the layperson, and also with his stated preference for *vipassanā* meditation techniques over the more elaborate *samādhi* systems. Buddhadāsa's views on meditation are discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

Buddhadāsa maintains that not only is the traditional interpretation of the *Dhammadinna Sutta* wrong but that, "The misunderstandings of some people who try to separate *lokiya* and *lokuttara* concerns will destroy the very truth of Buddhism."(T)[58] While acknowledging the different social roles or activities of the monk and the layperson, Buddhadāsa says that in fact the Buddha never spoke of *lokiyadhamma* as something totally different from and opposed to *lokuttaradhamma*. Instead he says that the Buddha taught,

> *Lokiyadhamma* is the duty or business of the layperson who has to

[57] *Cuḷasuññatā Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, Vol.14/verse334/pp.180-181.

[58] Phutthathāt, "Upasak Häeng Kān-phöey-phrāe Tham" ("อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม"), p.49.

practise *dhamma* in accordance with their common character. But at the same time the Buddha also gave knowledge of *lokuttaradhamma* for the purpose of governing those *lokiya* duties so they would be performed without suffering.(T)[59]

The debate over what practices the Buddha actually prescribed for the layperson is complicated both by some basic confusions and by conflicting views presented in different parts of the scriptures. Firstly, there appears to be a common confusion on the part of Buddhadāsa's critics between the two terms *lokadhamma* and *lokiyadhamma*. In the *Catukka Nipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*[60] *lokadhamma* is defined as the eight "worldly factors" or "worldly conditions" of: (1) *lābha* - acquisition, (2) *alābha* - loss, (3) *yaso* - renown, (4) *ayaso* - ignominy, (5) *nindā* - blame, (6) *pasaṁsā* - praise, (7) *sukhaṁ* - well-being, and (8) *dukkhaṁ* - suffering. These are the conditions given as characteristic of someone who is still attached to the objects of the world. *Lokiyadhamma*, on the other hand, refers to the notion of a separate path for the layperson which has a different goal and object from the *lokuttaradhamma* of the *bhikkhu*. It is true that in places in the scriptures, such as in the *Lokavipatti Sutta*[61], the Buddha says that the *puthujana* or "worldling" is caught in *lokadhamma* while the *ariyasāvaka* or "noble follower" of the Buddha is not. However, it is not the case that the Buddha associates *lokiyadhamma* with *puthujana*, and it appears that the two terms *lokiyadhamma* and *lokadhamma* are often wrongly equated. In fact the Buddha himself does not use either of the terms *lokiyadhamma* or *lokuttaradhamma* anywhere in the *Suttapiṭaka*, their first canonical occurrence being in the *Dhammasaṅganī* of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*[62]

Another commonly confused point is that the terms *puthujana* and *ariyasāvaka* are often mistakenly read as denoting "layperson" and "monk" respectively. But in the actual canon it is not specified whether either an *ariyasāvaka* ("noble follower") or a *puthujana* ("worldling") is either a layperson or a monk. Buddhadāsa's position that the Buddha did not specify a lay path distinct from the path of the monk is therefore vindicated by a strictly literal reading of the *Suttapiṭaka*.

However, it is nevertheless understandable how the popular views and

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[59]ibid. p.46.

[60]*Catukka Nipāta*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Vol.21/verse192/p.180.

[61]*Lokavipatti Sutta*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Vol.23/verse96/p.123.

[62]*Dhammasaṅganī*, *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, Vol.34/verse706/p.248, Vol.34/verse911/p.315.

confusions arose. Firstly, scattered throughout the *suttas* are numerous statements denigrating the status of the layperson and extolling the renunciate role, "[To be] a restricted layperson is the way of dust, [to enter] the monkhood is the way free and clear."(T)[63] As Siddhi Butr-Indr notes the path to *nibbāna*,

> is open to monk and lay adherent alike, yet due to the lesser opportunities a lay adherent has for a spiritual life, he is mostly considered to be second to the monk whose monastic life offers greater possibilities of spiritual advancement.[64]

And the traditional identifications of the term *puthujana* with layperson, and the term *ariyasāvaka* with monk, do appear to have the implicit support of the Buddha. This is because when he comments that *putthujana* are caught in *lokadhamma* the Buddha is almost invariably addressing an audience of *bhikkhus*, and encouraging them in their vocation by showing the benefits of their life of renunciation when compared with the troubled life of the householder. There is, therefore, a tension between Buddhadāsa's strictly literal reading of the scriptures on this issue and the more contextual reading favoured by Buddhist traditionalists. The views of both sides are founded in the scriptures but both are also one-sided in their respective approach to and analysis of the texts.

Indeed, Buddhadāsa's own writings exhibit an unresolved tension resulting from his taking a literal interpretation of the scriptures in some places but using a more contextual or metaphorical reading in others. As mentioned in Chapter Three a major difficulty of Buddhadāsa's phāsākhon - phāsātham theory is his failure to provide any definite criterion for judging whether a specific section of the scriptures should be read literally, as phāsā-khon, or metaphorically, as phāsā-tham. Without such a criterion Buddhadāsa's alternation between literalist phāsā-khon readings and metaphorical phāsā-tham interpretations of different parts of the scriptures cannot avoid the charge of being cloaks for his own bias. For example, he seems to degrade the spiritual status of the layperson when he talks to monks on the issue of being ordained for three months, but elsewhere he wants to raise the layperson to the level of the monk. On this second point Buddhadāsa goes much further than following what the Buddha taught when he says,

> The layperson's *dhamma* is necessary for the person who would attain *nibbāna* ... If one cannot be a layperson well then one cannot attain

[63] *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol.9/verse279/p.254.

[64] Butr-Indr, p.77.

nibbāna.(T)[65]

In other words Buddhadāsa is claiming that the fruits of the supramundane *lokuttara* path are unrealisable without being founded on the mundane level of activity. This highly unconventional claim, the complete converse of the traditional view that *nibbāna* is only attainable by maintaining a radical separation between the *lokiya* and *lokuttara* domains, follows from Buddhadāsa's opinion that, "Being a layperson has the meaning of studying the *dhamma* itself."(T)[66], that is, in one's actual life. In other words Buddhadāsa regards following the *dhamma* in lay life as giving one a practical understanding of Buddhism as opposed to the often theoretical understanding of the monks. Furthermore this practical understanding, born of adhering to the *dhamma* throughout all life's vicissitudes, is regarded as breeding a more effective approach to attaining salvation.

5.6 Conclusion.

A major determinant of Buddhadāsa's denial of the traditional monk-lay distinction is the fact that it is the popular lay religion which contains the most Brahmanical and animist features, which conflict with his rationalist and modernist outlook. In seeking to make Buddhism consistent with both a modernist or scientific world view, and with the fundamental principles of the religion, Buddhadāsa must reject the customary beliefs and practices of the lay populace which conflict with this radically doctrinal interpretation of the religion. But if the lay Buddhist populace is to be left with any significant religious form in Buddhadāsa's system then this can only be accomplished by including them within the ambit of his reformed or purified doctrinal Buddhism, an aspect of the religion which was previously open only to monks. However, if we regard Buddhadāsa as an ideologue as much as a scholar, and therefore writing with his modernist lay Buddhist audience in mind, then the expectations of that audience should be considered as possibly being as powerful an influence on his universalisation of Buddhist soteriological doctrine as the abovementioned theoretical requirement of maintaining consistency with rationaliist and doctrinal principles. That Buddhadāsa does have his audience in mind in his redefinition of *nibbāna* is made clear in the following statement,

What benefit is there in the teaching that we will get *nibbāna* after we

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[65]**Phutthathāt**, *Kharāwāt Tham* ("ฆราวาสธรรม"), p.41.

[66]ibid. p.4.

> have died? It is as a result of this that modern people are not interested in *nibbāna*. And in addition Buddhism is made barren by such teachings.(T)[67]

Buddhadāsa's use of the notion of "benefit" as a criterion for gauging the correctness of doctrinal interpretations provides a channel for the introduction of the contemporary social expectations of Buddhadāsa's lay audience into his re-interpreted system. For, as is made clear in the above quote Buddhadāsa regards a "beneficial" interpretation of doctrine to be one which is sufficiently in tune with people's attitudes to make them "interested" in the doctrine. His systematic reforms can thus be seen as not being motivated exclusively by his own scholarly desire for a rationalist and doctrinally consistent Buddhism. They are also motivated by a desire to mould Buddhist teachings in response to the expectations of his lay audience, in an attempt to re-establish the relevance of Buddhism to the lives and aspirations of that lay audience.

As discussed in Chapter Two modernist and progressive Thai Buddhists, like Buddhadāsa, also reject the popular animist and supernatural forms of Buddhism as irrational and unscientific. They have consequently turned their interest to the traditionally clerical, doctrinal level of Theravāda Buddhism. While Buddhadāsa's concern to abolish the theoretical distinctions between monks and laypeople can be regarded as flowing from his own desire to make Buddhist doctrine consistent with modernist and rationalist principles the dominance of this concern in his work can also be interpreted as a response to the demands of his lay audience, to his attempt to make Buddhism socially relevant. Buddhadāsa's work should be read as a confluence of these two influences.

But because of his emphasis on ending the monk-lay distinction Buddhadāsa must also resolve tensions which arise from making the formerly clerical ideal of *nibbāna* both theoretically and practically consistent with the life of the layperson in contemporary Thailand. For example, it is no longer acceptable that *nibbāna* be defined as a condition attainable only by years of intense meditative practice in monastic isolation. It is precisely that traditional view of the goal of Buddhism which has both in theory and in practice barred the layperson from sharing in its fruits and which has contributed to what Buddhadāsa recognises as the growing irrelevance of Buddhism in Thailand. Defining <u>cit-wāng</u> both as the naturally existing unperturbed state of mind which everyone experiences from time to time and as the basis of *nibbāna* provides a much more lay-accessible view of the

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[67]id., *Nipphān Nōrk Khamphī Aphitham* ("นิพพานนอกคัมภีร์อภิธรรม"), p.6.

religion's goal. Nevertheless, it is a measure of the unconventional nature of this interpretation that Buddhadāsa has first had to develop a new hermeneutic approach to the scriptures and also criticise the authority of almost a third of the Theravāda canon plus the historically accepted system of scriptural exegesis in order to present his views. Without the phāsā-tham theory and without rejecting the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and parts of the *Visuddhimagga* Buddhadāsa would have found it much more difficult to deny the traditional supernaturalist interpretations which he regards as being inconsistent with the actual doctrines of Buddhism and with modern scientific knowledge.

Buddhadāsa's notion of cit-wāng and his interpretation of *nibbāna* provide a religious goal which has its basis in everyday life - the higher spiritual states requiring only the development and deepening of the naturally existing condition of "freed-mind". By this theoretical development Buddhadāsa brings the Buddhist spiritual goal out of the monastery and into the stream of everyday life. However, cit-wāng is far from being just a theoretical notion. It is also the basis of Buddhadāsa's interpretation of Buddhist spiritual practice, and just as in his doctrinal interpretations he defines the state of cit-wāng as being integrally related to everyday experience so too the practices Buddhadāsa describes as developing this condition are also related to the domain of everyday life. As will be detailed in the next chapter cit-wāng is the basis of Buddhadāsa's Buddhist philosophy of action in the social world.

CHAPTER 6

THE PRACTICE OF CIT-WANG.

In Chapter Five the importance of Buddhadāsa's interpretation of the notion of cit-wāng and his attempts to abolish the traditional distinction between the lay and clerical forms of Buddhism were discussed. The notion of cit-wāng, defined as the base of Buddhist spiritual attainment founded in everyday life, is the central plank of Buddhadāsa's attempt to resolve the theoretical difficulties created by his advocacy of a modernist, scientific interpretation of Theravāda Buddhism and his rejection of the traditional lay religion. Buddhadāsa response has been to develop an interpretation of doctrinal Buddhism which he maintains is as accessible and relevant to the world-involved layperson as it is to renunciates. However, in order to fully resolve the difficulties raised by his presentation of a rationalist interpretation of Buddhism which rejects the traditional lay religion as superstitious and inconsistent Buddhadāsa must provide more than simply a theoretical explanation of the relevance of doctrinal Buddhism to the layperson.

In addition to arguing for lay access to the *nibbānic* form of Buddhism Buddhadāsa must also demonstrate that a layperson's adherence to the teachings and practices of this traditionally clerical aspect of Buddhism is compatible with materially-oriented activity in the social world. He must demonstrate the compatibility of simultaneously working for both material well-being in the social world and striving for *nibbāna* if he is indeed to provide full and unqualified lay access to doctrinal Buddhism. Because of the high level of social awareness and concern for social development among Buddhadāsa's main audience any interpretation of Buddhism which perpetuated the traditional devaluation of material and social activity relative to spiritual practice would fail to produce what he has stated is the goal of his work, namely, an interpretation of Buddhism which is perceived by educated Thais as being relevant to their lives and to their work. Modernist Thai Buddhists desire not only that Buddhism be compatible with progressive social involvement but that it also support and encourage development in the material sphere alongside with promoting spiritual progress towards *nibbāna*.

For Buddhadāsa to meet these requirements he must demonstrate, firstly, that

the **practice**, as well as the theory, of salvation in his interpretation of Buddhism is accessible to the layperson. Secondly, he must show that this practice is compatible with and supportive of progressive social activity. These two requirements are discussed in this chapter in the context of an analysis of Buddhadāsa's teachings on the practice of cit-wāng, firstly in terms of the relationship between cit-wāng and Buddhist meditation, and secondly in terms of the relation between meditation and action or "work" in the world.

6.1 Traditional Buddhist Moral and Meditative Practice.

Traditionally Buddhist spiritual practice has had a three tiered structure, the base of which is *sīla* or virtuous conduct. *Sīla* or moral practice, combined with an understanding of Buddhist teachings on the causes and methods of ending human suffering, is regarded as the foundation of *samādhi* meditation, the second stage of spiritual practice. The purpose of *samādhi* or concentration meditation is to calm the mind and develop one-pointedness or undivided mental attention. In the third stage of Buddhist practice, *vipassanā* or insight meditation, the concentrated power of consciousness is focussed in a quest for insight into the truths of existence - *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. With the attainment of such insight ignorance is dispelled and the root cause of suffering is eradicated, the ultimate fruit of insight meditation being salvation or *nibbāna*.

However, while this graded series of practices peaking at the attainment of *nibbāna* is theoretically acknowledged as the structure of Buddhist religious practice, historically, varying degrees of emphasis have in fact been placed on the different stages. In particular, there has been an historical emphasis in Thailand on *samādhi* or concentration meditation, often to the exclusion of insight meditation or *vipassanā*. The emphasis on *samādhi* meditation in Thailand may be related to its traditional association with supernormal powers and supernatural experiences, which have been a focus of attention in popular, supernaturalist readings of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and related commentaries. *Samādhi* meditation induces trances or states of introspective absorption called *jhānas*. There are many levels of increasingly deep "absorptions" or *jhānas* which, Spiro observes, produce, "a certain type of concentration, which (it is believed) determines which of the Buddhist heavens one will eventually enter."[1] It is also believed that the *samādhi* practitioner, through the attainment of certain trance states may also develop supernormal powers such as clairvoyance and clairaudience. Supernatural powers or

[1] Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1971, p.50.

iddhis are in particular associated with the second level of *samādhi* concentration, called *upacāra* or access concentration. Phra Maha Boowa Nyanasampanno, the author of the biography of Acharn Mun, a monk famed for his psychic achievements, describes this second or *upacāra* level of *samādhi* concentration as allowing telepathic communication with invisible spiritual beings. Phra Maha Boowa also observes that the first or *khaṇika* level of *samādhi*,

> is not enough to pick up messages from outside or to communicate with these kinds of invisible beings. The third level of concentration is called *appanā* or full [absorption] concentration and is too profound for the picking up of messages and communicating with invisible beings.[2]

Buddhadāsa is critical of this traditional emphasis on the development of psychic powers or *iddhis* through *samādhi* meditation, and he is opposed to practising Buddhist meditation with the specific intention of developing *iddhis*,

> The Buddha did not deny mental *iddhis*, but he strongly disapproved of demonstrating them because they are mere illusions ... We don't come across it in the *Tipiṭaka* that the Buddha demonstrated *iddhis*. There do exist accounts of the Buddha demonstrating *iddhis*, but they occur only in commentaries and other works. Consequently the truth of these accounts is dubious; and there really is no need for us to judge them true or false.[3]

Apart from their association with the development of supernatural powers many doctrinally strict Buddhist teachers have also regarded the *jhānas* or *samādhi*-induced trance states as in fact being spiritual hindrances to the attainment of liberative insight into reality. This is because, in Spiro's words, "The meditator may prefer to perpetuate his *jhānic* pleasures rather than proceed to *nibbāna*."[4] And Buddhadāsa agrees with this view, saying that,

> While the mind is concentrated [in *samādhi*] it is likely to be experiencing such a satisfying kind of bliss and well-being that the meditator may become attached to it or imagine it to be the fruit of the path [i.e. *nibbāna*].[5]

Nevertheless, as Spiro comments, for many monks and for the majority of Buddhist laypeople,

> It is the supernatural products of meditation which they view as holy

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[2](Venerable Phra Acharn Maha) Boowa Nyanasampanno, p.60n.

[3]Buddhadāsa, *Buddha-dhamma for Students*, p.47.

[4]Spiro, p.51.

[5]Buddhadāsa, *Handbook for Mankind*, p.70.

and for which they venerate monastic meditators who, allegedly, have achieved these supernormal states.[6]

6.2 Buddhadāsa's Emphasis on *Vipassanā* Meditation.

Thus, in addition to its value as the base to insight meditation or *vipassanā*, *samādhi* is also important to traditionalist Thai Buddhists who adhere to the Brahmanical and animist heritage of Theravāda Buddhism because of its association with supernatural powers and psychic communication with celestial beings. It is for this same reason that Buddhadāsa de-emphasises *samādhi* and is critical of the traditional emphasis on concentration meditation in Thailand. In contrast he maintains that it is *vipassanā* or insight meditation which is the most important aspect of Buddhist spiritual practice. He says *samādhi*,

> may come about naturally, on the one hand, and as a result of organised practice on the other. The end result is identical in both cases; the mind is concentrated and fit to be used for carrying out close introspection. One thing must be noticed, however, the intensity of concentration [i.e. *samādhi*] that comes about naturally is usually sufficient and appropriate for introspection, and insight, whereas the concentration resulting from organised training is usually excessive, more than can be made use of.[7]

Buddhadāsa goes further and actually denounces the practice of *samādhi* which is central to the supernaturalist view of Buddhism,

> A deeply concentrated mind cannot practice introspection at all. It is in a state of unawareness and is of no use for insight [*vipassanā*]. Deep concentration is a major obstacle to insight practice.[8]

In these words Buddhadāsa is in fact championing one of the several canonically recognised meditative paths to *nibbāna*, the *vipassanā*-based *sukhavipassatha* or "dry-visioned" attainment of *nibbāna*, so called because its practice does not result in the meditator experiencing any of the supernatural delights attained through *jhāna* or *samādhi* meditation. The "dry-visioned" attainment of *nibbāna* results from a direct, unelaborated insight into liberative truth. *Sukhavipassatha* is to attain *nibbāna* after a penetrating insight into reality attained upon the foundation of only the basic concentration level called *upacāra samādhi* or "access concentration". Buddhadāsa is in accord with Buddhist doctrine

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[6] **Spiro**, p.51n.

[7] **Buddhadāsa**, *Handbook for Mankind*, p.70.

[8] ibid. p.73.

when he says that a mind in any *samàdhi* state higher than *upacàra* cannot practice *vipassanà* meditation and that to develop liberative insight via *vipassanà* the mind must first come out of the higher trance states.

However, the Buddhist scriptures also describe another much more elaborate meditative path to *nibbàna* than the more straightforward *sukhavipassatha* or *vipassanà* method supported by Buddhadàsa. This alternative meditative path in fact utilises the very *jhànic* trances or *samàdhi* concentrations which ordinarily inhibit the development of the liberative insight into reality obtained from *vipassanà*-type meditations. This path via *samàdhi* concentrations has nine stages. The first eight stages constitute the four *rũpajjhànas* or meditative absorptions of the fine material sphere and the four higher absorptions of the immaterial spheres, which are called the four *arũpajjhànas* or *arũpàyatana*. These *jhànic* trances all involve intense concentration,

> during which there is a complete, though temporary, suspension of the fivefold sense activity ... The state of consciousness, however, is one of full alertness and lucidity.[9]

The four higher *jhànas* are based on a process of "voiding" or "emptying" consciousness of the sense of entitative existence or *attà*. Objects of consciousness are systematically broken down into their components in order to develop insight into the truth of the non-essential, non-self character of all phenomenal existence. The culmination of this process is meditative concentration on pure voidness or *suññatà* itself. In the *Cũḷasuññatà Sutta* the Buddha describes how to practise the meditation of "voiding" the mind of entitative awareness by subtracting, one after another, the perceived entitative or *attà* qualities of various objects, in this case a house,

> He [the meditating monk] knows clearly that this ideation is emptied of the awareness that it is a house, that it is something human and he has clear awareness only of that single thing which it is not emptied of ... Thus he considers the voidness [*suññatà*] of those things which do not [in fact] exist in that ideation [of a house] and he knows clearly that which does continue to exist and which still is. Ananda, such as this is the *bhikkhu's* progress towards voidness [*suññatà*] according to truth which is pure and not in error.(T)[10]

After having subtracted all the material qualities and attributes of the object of meditation the meditator proceeds to concentrate, in succession, on the

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[9]**Nyanatiloka**, p.83.

[10]*Cũḷsuññatà Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikàya*, Vol.14/verse334/pp.180-181.

increasingly abstract and "voided" states of (i) the realm of the infinity of space, *àkàsānañcàyatana*; (ii) the realm of the infinity of consciousness, *viññāṇañcàyatana*; (iii) consciousness of the realm of nothingness, *àkiñcaññàyatana*; and finally (iv) consciousness of the realm of neither perception nor non-perception, *nevasaññānàsaññàyatana*. These four higher meditations or *arūpajjhànas* involve a process of gradually extricating the meditator from his or her sense of selfhood as well as of the entitative character of the objects of consciousness. The meditations are a method to assist the meditator attain insight into reality.

A state beyond all these stages of *samàdhi* is identified in the *Pañcāla Sutta* where it is called *saññàvedayitanirodha*[11]. This ninth stage is described as the cessation of consciousness and sensation in which all *āsava* or latent mental impurities disappear because of the attainment of penetrating wisdom, *paññā*. After this mental purification through intense concentration *nibbāna* can then be attained.

The *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* provides a more detailed account of *saññàvedayitanirodha*. In this *sutta* the ninth stage of *samàdhi* is described as a concentration devoid of any signs or distinguishing features where *suññatà* or absolute void is the object of consciousness. But this meditative state nevertheless still has "combining factors" or *saṅkhāra*, i.e. *kammic* residues, capable of arising and destroying the concentration-induced condition of mental calm. For this reason the ninth *samādhi* stage is still an impermanent condition, seeing as it may still be subject to disturbances or disruptions. But when the meditator attains the realisation that even this exalted state is subject to cessation and can pass away then he or she is released from the *àsavas* of lust, desire for being and of ignorance, (i.e. *kāmàsava*, *bhavāsava*, *avijjàsava*) and the mind then attains *ñāṇa* or liberating wisdom. At this point,

> It is the end of birth. The practice of the moral life has reached its end. The work that should be done is finished and no other work for existing in this [liberated] way need be performed.(T)[12]

In other words *nibbāna* can be attained by a transcendence of even the highest *samàdhi* meditation on voidness, *saññàvedayitanirodha*.

But Buddhadàsa rejects this elaborate, intricate and difficult meditative system for attaining *nibbāna* via *samàdhi*, which requires a life devoted solely to meditative practice. Instead he maintains that the most appropriate spiritual practice is the practice of <u>cit-wāng</u> or *sati*, mindfulness of breathing. Buddhadàsa proposes that in

[11] *Pañcāla Sutta*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Vol.14/verse246/p.362.

[12] *Cūḷasuññata Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, Vol.14/verse341/p.183.

practising the commonest and most basic form of Buddhist meditation, mindfulness of breathing or *ānāpānasati*, sufficient concentration or *samādhi* is developed to permit liberative insight into reality. Spiro describes the general practice of mindfulness as, "where one attends to, and is self-consciously aware - in the minutest detail - of one's every act, thought, sensation and emotion."[13] In the specific practice of the mindfulness of breathing,

> one not only attains total concentration, but also becomes aware in one's own body of one of the characteristics of existence, i.e. impermanence.[14]

Buddhadāsa rejects the intricacies of the *samādhi* system because he says the Buddha has provided a short-cut system to enlightenment. He maintains that the practices detailed in the Noble Eightfold Path or *ariyamagga*, whose acme is *samāsamādhi* or "right *samādhi*", is for,

> people who will not take short-cuts. It is not the wrong path; it is the right path. But it is on the ordinary level, and takes a long time.[15]

He says that the short-cut or *sukhavipassatha* method involves not clinging to sensed objects or to the notion of self. That is, he proposes that the development of cit-wāng is the key to Buddhist soteriological practice and says that once cit-wāng or the attitude of non-self-centredness is developed the rest of Buddhism's spiritual practices are developed automatically,

> Not to hold that there is selfhood [*attā*] in eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind, causes the arising of the entire Noble Eightfold Path [and thus of *samādhi*] in a single moment.[16]

Buddhadāsa does not dispute the traditional gradation of Buddhist practices into *sīla* - *samādhi* - *vipassanā*, but he proposes that the mindfulness attained through the practice of cit-wāng provides sufficient concentration to operate as a basis for insight practice, thus rendering the elaborate *jhānic* concentrations and their supernatural products irrelevant,

> If we set the mind right or prevent it from craving and clinging then **that** is *samādhi*, it is the very thing of *samādhi* itself. Then whether we are acting, speaking, walking, eating or whatever, we will remain in that

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[13] Spiro, p.51.

[14] ibid. p.52.

[15] Buddhadāsa, *Buddha-dhamma for Students*, p.19.

[16] ibid. p.20.

> *samàdhi*. That is, the mind is free from "I" and "mine". We will have both the well-being and the penetrating keenness to think, consider and work with our heart and mind in everything. Hence I say that to have *samàdhi* is easy, as easy as rolling a stone down a hill.(T)[17]

6.3 Cit-wāng - A Lay-accessible Path to *Nibbàna*.

Spiritual practice based on cit-wāng is of central importance to Buddhadàsa's total system of doctrinal re-interpretation and reform. Cit-wāng is the basis of Buddhist spiritual practice aiming at the attainment of *nibbàna* which, while preserving the traditional graduated *sīla* - *samàdhi* - *vipassanà* schema of Buddhist practice, also purges Buddhist meditation of the Brahmanical and supernatural emphasis on *samàdhi* meditation which is supported by religious traditionalists. Mindfulness or *sati* based on cit-wāng also provides a meditative system which bypasses the complexities of the monastically-oriented *samàdhi* system and which is accessible to the layperson who, when compared with the more leisured monks, has little free time available for meditative practice. Buddhadàsa emphasises the general accessibility of the practice of cit-wāng or non-self-centred mindfulness, and thus the accessibility of salvation, by maintaining that if it is practised correctly the mindfulness of cit-wāng can itself lead to *nibbàna*. Buddhist doctrine details a series of stages on the path to ending suffering and Buddhadàsa claims that each of these stages follow on from one another in a natural succession, starting from the fundamental mindful practice of cit-wāng or non-self-centredness. He claims that it is,

> just by making our own daily living so pure and honest that there develop in succession spiritual joy (*pīti*, *pamoda*), calm (*passadhi*), insight into the true nature of things (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*), disenchantment (*nibbidā*), withdrawal (*virāga*), escape (*vimutti*), purification from defilements (*visuddhi*), and then peace or *nibbàna*.[18]

Buddhadàsa says that once the basic practice of cit-wāng is established the entire process of liberation culminating in *nibbàna* is set in motion,

> Because the fruit of the path arises automatically once the path is established, the attainment of the path is regarded as the culmination of the practice.[19]

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[17]**Phutthathāt**, *Withī Fyk Samàthi-wipatsanà - Lem* 1 ("วิธีฝึกสมาธิวิปัสสนา, เล่ม 1"), pp.48-49.

[18]**Buddhadāsa**, *Handbook for Mankind*, p.84.

[19]ibid. p.87.

Thus just as there is no need for special concentration or *samādhi* practices, according to Buddhadāsa spiritual insight and salvation also develop as a natural consequence of being established in the mindfulness of cit-wāng. He supports his case by citing scriptural instances of people who are described as having attained *nibbāna* naturally, without following any specific system such as *jhānic* or *samādhi* concentrations,

> These people did not go into the forest and sit, assiduously practising concentration on certain objects, in the way described in the later manuals.[20]

For Buddhadāsa *nibbāna* or salvation requires neither the special learning of the scholastically trained monk nor the retreatist monastic lifestyle,

> Through the power of just this naturally occurring concentration, most of us could actually attain liberation. We could attain the fruit of the path, *nibbāna*, *arahantship*, just by means of natural concentration.[21]

Buddhadāsa does not deny the value of the more systematic *samādhi* approach to meditation, saying that it may be of use to those who are still at a relatively undeveloped spiritual stage and, "who still cannot perceive the unsatisfactoriness of worldly existence with their own eyes, naturally."[22] But the general import of his system of practice, like his interpretation of the doctrine, is to declericalise salvation and to provide a path to *nibbāna* for the ordinary layperson, negating the spiritual distinction between layperson and monk. Buddhadāsa is not concerned with the doctrinal details of enlightenment or salvation, with the different types of saving wisdom or *paññā* or with the various meditative states listed as producing that wisdom in the *Abhidhamma* and commentary literature. Rather, in accord with his rationalist emphasis on general principles and the notion of universal law underpinning Buddhist doctrine Buddhadāsa believes that the attainment of *nibbāna* is guaranteed once the proper moral and meditative basis is established. For Buddhadāsa *nibbāna* is not a miraculous or supernatural condition but is the culmination of systematic spiritual practices which operate in full accord with the general laws of existence realised by the Buddha.

For Buddhadāsa the foundation of correct spiritual practice is the most important thing in attaining salvation. For when the foundation, i.e. cit-wāng, is

[20]ibid. pp.70-71.

[21]ibid. p.77.

[22]ibid. p.85.

laid correctly he maintains that the structure arises automatically through the operation of the natural laws which the Buddha utilised and systematically followed. Buddhadāsa consequently sees his duty as a monk and spiritual instructor as being to demonstrate and detail how the path to salvation may be begun, or how the stream to *nibbāna* may be enterred, from the position of being an individual living in contemporary Thailand. There is no need for elaborate descriptions of supernatural mental states or for detailed descriptions of different conditions of wisdom or insight in Buddhadāsa's system. For once the path is correctly followed all the rest, right up to salvation, follows as an inevitable and natural consequence.

6.4 Debate on the Compatibility of Cit-wāng with Social Action.

However, Buddhadāsa's opening up of Buddhism's soteriological practices is by no means universally welcomed. Former Thai Prime Minister, Khukrit Pramot, voices the following objection,

> In olden times when a child asked its elders about *vipassanā* [insight meditation] ... no-one spoke. They said it was a secret. The instructors ordered not to let just anyone be taught, the student had to be chosen. It was not a widespread teaching. Hence up until now Buddhism has not gone against national development or the foundation of government.(T)[23]

Khukrit believes that the attainment of higher spiritual states is incompatible with worldly involvement and so he lauds the traditional practice of restricting access to the soteriological aspect of Buddhism to the few, i.e. to monks. Khukrit is consequently concerned by the popularisation of Buddhist meditation techniques among the lay populace, maintaining that if people attain cit-wāng through meditation they will be in no position to aid the development of the country,

> Because the person who has no cravings or attachments, the person whose mind is freed [i.e. cit-wāng], holds to nothing as himself or as his own he is in no condition to he able to develop the country, develop the land or to even develop himself.(T)[24]

Khukrit is here expressing the widely held view that the spiritual path to *nibbāna* and the path of worldly involvement cannot both be traversed at the same time. A Sri Lankan monk, Somathera, makes a similar comment,

> In those who seek immortality [*nibbāna*], all kinds of endeavour and exertion to acquire worldly power and possessions become slack through he perception of death [*anicca*] but they do that all that has to be done for

[23]Khlykrit Prāmōt, p.7.

[24]ibid. p.2.

attaining the deathless state.[25]

In this same context Buddhadāsa observes that his notion of cit-wāng has been criticised as a threat to Thailand's national security,

> [It has been accused that] if the Thai people have cit-wāng completely they will not love their country and they will not protect their country.(T)[26]

But Buddhadāsa claims that the emotional detachment and calm of cit-wāng is not at all the same as the social disinterestedness which Khukrit and others maintain follows from the cultivation of "freed-mind". Rather than hindering the attainment of social or material goals Buddhadāsa says that by removing the confusions caused by self-centredness such goals will in fact be attained more efficiently and with less suffering,

> I want the layperson to be able to work with less suffering and to have completely successful results. By what means will we attain this? Will it not be done with cit-wāng, or would a confused mind be better?(T)[27]

Buddhadāsa appears to take his lead on this point from the *Subha Sutta*[28] where the Buddha is asked about the relative statuses of the work of a layperson, who has many concerns, and of a monk who has few distractions, regarding their relative abilities to follow the path to *nibbāna*. The Buddha replied that work undertaken with great desire and great effort, if struck by disaster, will come to naught while a work undertaken with little desire and little confusion, if fortuitous, can produce great results. In other words working in an unattached way, as in cit-wāng, does not of itself prevent "great results", of whatever kind, from being produced.

But Khukrit remains skeptical of the possibility of work or worldly activity for social development being pleasurable,

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[25] Soma Thera, *Words Leading to Disenchantment*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy Sri Lanka, 1978, p.4.

[26] Phutthathāt, *Cit-praphatsorn - Cit-dōēm-thāē - Cit-Wāng Myan-kan Rȳ Yāng-rai* ("จิตประภัสสร – จิตเดิมแท้ – จิตว่าง เหมือนกันหรืออย่างไร" *Prabhassara-mind, Original-mind and Freed-mind - Are They the Same?*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2517 (1974), p.22.

[27] Cited in Pun Congprasōēt (ed), *Wiwātha Rawāng M.R.W. Khykrit Prāmōt Kap Thān Phutthathāt Phikkhu Nai Rȳang Cit-wāng* ("วิวาทะระหว่าง ม.ร.ว. คึกฤทธิ์ ปราโมช กับท่านพุทธทาสภิกขุในเรื่องจิตว่าง), p.52.

[28] *Subha Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, Vol.13/verse711/p.492.

> I think that if one wants to obtain successful results in the world those results must be bought with suffering ... [If one wants] true wāng without suffering, one must completely sacrifice worldly success ... When one is a layperson there must be some happiness and some suffering, it is not wāng.(T)[29]

Buddhadāsa retorts that the example of the Buddha's various strenuous propagatory and teaching activities carried out after his enlightenment show that having the mental peace of cit-wāng, and of *nibbāna*, in no way hinders the fulfilment of demanding worldly tasks,

> There has never been any evidence anywhere [for the supposition that] those who are free of *kilesa* will not work. The Lord Buddha and the *arahants* worked more than us, sacrificed more than us and became more tired than us, and all their work was for helping others.(T)[30]

But at this point Khukrit remains fast to his traditionalist views, for unlike Buddhadāsa he does not regard the Buddha's life as a realistic model for the average person. Talking of *nibbāna* he says,

> The person who reaches a state such as this naturally cannot live in the world like an ordinary person. They cannot live as a householder in the society of householders ... They must try to get away from society. This is the usual thing upon attaining the fruits of the path.(T)[31]

Khukrit's criticisms of Buddhadāsa's abolition of the *lokiya - lokuttara* distinction and of the propagation of the notion of cit-wāng may, however, be motivated by political considerations as much as by any simple religious conservatism. Khukrit maintains, for example, that monks should have no mundane associations or direct social involvement whatever,

> It is a sin for a saint to establish a foundation[32], even if that foundation has the object of helping our fellow man. Because, if established, a foundation will cause attachment and craving to arise. When there is not

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[29]Cited in **Pun** Congprasöet, *Wiwathā Rawāng M.R.W. Khykrit Prāmōt Kap Thān Phutthathāt Phikkhu Nai Rỵang , Cit-wāng* ("วิวาทะระหวาง ม.ร.ว. คึกฤทธิ์ ปราโมช กับทานพุทธทาสภิกขุในเรื่องจิตวาง"), p.52.

[30]**Phutthathāt**, "Upasak Hāeng Kān-phöey-phrāe Tham" ("อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม"), p.19.

[31]**Khykrit** Prāmōt, p.4.

[32]This may be a reference to Buddhadāsa's involvement in the Thammathān Foundation established in Chaiya, Southern Thailand, by Buddhadāsa together with his brother Dhammadāsa for the purpose of propagating their views on Buddhism. Khukrit may also be referring here the more open political involvement of the monk Kittiwutthō with right-wing movements in the 1973-1976 period.

enough money there is suffering, doing anything will lead to suffering.(T)[33]

Here Khukrit is assuming that involvement in the world is intrinsically linked with suffering and the moment a saint (i.e. one who is free from suffering) enters the mundane domain, even to help another, that worldly involvement must have the unwholesome or *akusala* moral and spiritual effect of causing the saint to suffer or fall from his state of spiritual attainment. Buddhadāsa, however, maintains that it is not worldly involvement **per se** but the attitude of attachment when acting in the material world which leads to suffering.

However, Khukrit's assertion that a saint cannot enter the world without soiling his saintly status - coming from a seasoned politician and former Prime Minister - may be as much a call for the complete separation of church and state as an expression of religious belief. There are several reasons why a politician might seek to keep the *saṅgha* out of politics, not the least of which is to ward off the development of a potential alternative source of power in the country. As a strongly organised body the *saṅgha* would indeed be a potent political force if its energies were more directed into the mundane realm. As noted in Chapter One successive Thai governments have maintained tight control over the *saṅgha* to strip it of effective power and to prevent the order of monks from possibly using its strong organisation and prestige in Thai society against those governments. In addition to the explicit legal and political controls on the *saṅgha's* activities the doctrine that the worldly domain is the sinful antithesis of the spiritual realm and that a monk's enterring the social world entails a spiritual pollution which automatically destroys his spiritual authority also functions as an ideological barrier to the expansion of the *saṅgha's* activities into the socio-political realm. Buddhadāsa's views threaten this traditional isolation of the *saṅgha* from politics and Khukrit's criticisms can be read as an attempt to maintain the ideological **status quo**. But despite the criticisms of traditionalists Buddhadāsa insists that his interpretations are in strict accordance with the Buddha's teachings. In replying to criticisms that the doctrinal teachings of *anattā* or cit-wāng are in fact too abstract and remote for the average person he retorts,

> But I have tried to do what is best, to follow just what the Lord Buddha suggested, that the lay people should know about *suññatā* or cit-wāng as is appropriate for them.(T)[34]

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[33]**Khykrit** Prāmōt, p.5.

[34]**Phutthathāt**, "Kharāwāt Tham" ("ฆราวาสธรรม"), p.55.

The average person should know about the central doctrines of Buddhism because,

> It is clearly written in Pali, in the blessed scriptures, the Lord Buddha said *suññatā* is a matter having eternal benefit in helping the laity.(T)[35]

6.5 Buddhadāsa on *Kamma* and Suffering.

In complete opposition to Khukrit's views Buddhadāsa denies that lay people are fated to suffer, "If one acts well and correctly as a lay person one may be able to avoid suffering."(T)[36] Buddhadāsa denies that suffering is something intrinsic to lay life and says that it need not be accepted passively as the unavoidable result of past fate or *kamma*. Commenting on the distractions and confusions of the householder's life he says,

> Those things do not exist for the sake of giving suffering or for either directly or specifically being suffering. They may have come into being as lessons or as tests to advance the [spiritual] level of human beings.(T)[37]

Buddhadāsa does not specifically deny the traditional view that the sufferings of a layperson are fated because of their *kamma*, but he does oppose the interpretation that suffering is a spiritual impediment,

> If we look at it from the point of view of suffering then it is suffering, but if we look at it from a better perspective then it is just. That is, it is something that teaches and drives us forward quickly ... obstacles or suffering are tools to help us subsequently become spiritually intelligent.(T)[38]

For Buddhadāsa suffering is just not simply because it is retribution for misdeeds, which in Buddhist doctrine it is, but more importantly because it leads to the future benefits of learning how to avoid suffering and how to progress spiritually quickly. Buddhadāsa inverts the notion of *kamma* from the traditional interpretation of it being a spiritual block or hindrance. He regards the suffering human beings are fated to as a positive tool which rather, than holding one back or barring one from salvation, is in fact capable of accelerating one's attainment of *nibbāna* if correctly appreciated and acted upon. He advises that if suffering arises because of

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[35] ibid. pp.61-62.

[36] ibid. p.119.

[37] ibid. p.124.

[38] ibid. pp.124-125.

the concerns of being a layperson, "Don't accept it as suffering and torture, take it as a problem which must be solved."(T)[39] Buddhadāsa maintains that suffering is not something humans should passively endure as their fated moral due but is a tool which should be used as a spur to the attainment of greater things.

The implications of this re-interpretation of *kamma* and suffering are profound because it represents a fundamental shift in the Buddhist view of human existence and activity in the world. Buddhadāsa does not regard mundane existence as a punishment for past sins but as the domain in which human beings actively control and improve their lives in the quest to end the problems and sufferings of everyday life. Suffering is no longer ended only in a transcendent realm. For Buddhadāsa suffering is both created and destroyed at the mundane level and it can be ended not only mentally or through spiritual practice but also physically through material activity to better the social and material world. In other words in Buddhadāsa's interpretation the Buddhist goal of the cessation of suffering is placed within the very social world or mundane realm, *lokiya*, which in traditional Buddhism was the complete and utter opposite of salvation. On this point Tambiah has commented that,

> What Buddhadāsa's ideas forcefully refute and deny is the fatalism, the postponement of action, the unreality of this world and therefore apathy towards it attributed to Buddhism by certain stereotype commentaries. He is in fact saying that the world here and now ... comprise[s] the stage for urgent and immediate action in the form of Buddhist practice. Perhaps an even more important ideological assertion on his part is that the quest for *nirvana* does not mean a negation and renunciation of action in the world.[40]

6.6 Cit-wāng and Work.

Buddhadāsa's conception of human beings as active controllers of their own material and spiritual progress is most clearly presented in his view of work as integrating both mundane and supramundane or social and spiritual activity. While fundamentally derived from the notion of *kamma* or action Buddhadāsa's interpretation of work has a much more this worldly import than the traditional Buddhist notion of *kamma*. Whereas *kamma* - i.e. world-involved activity inherently infected with craving and clinging - is traditionally regarded as something to be avoided because it leads to further entanglement in the cyclical net of

[39] ibid. p.128.

[40] Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, p.414.

suffering, Buddhadāsa defines work as an inherently liberative activity because it is related to the practice of *dhamma* and, he maintains, "the actual practice of *dhamma* is the work."[41] The basis of Buddhadāsa's notion of work is cit-wâng or, more precisely, the non-self-centred activity which he interprets as meaning to work for the sake of *dhamma* rather than for any self-interested motivation. His ideal is to be able to, "work for the work, to work for the sake of *dhamma*."(T)[42] Buddhadāsa instructs that we,

> should do every kind of work with a "freed-mind". All the results of work should be given up to "freed-ness". We should eat the food of "freed-ness" the way a monk eats. We should die to ourselves completely from the beginning.(T)[43]

To give up the results of working to "freed-ness" means not craving or clinging to those results but, like an ideal monk, to eat or act with the awareness that it is merely a congeries of essenceless (*anattā*) elements which are being eaten or acted upon. The result of such working with "freed-ness" is to eat without "tasting" the food, or to act without "tasting" the fruits or results of the action. That is, to act with cit-wâng is to maintain equanimity and not to be perturbed by either the good or bad results of acting, and so not to suffer from the vagaries of impermanent existence. It is Buddhadāsa's intention to render all human activity, including mundane material work, suffering-free, "If we have *dhamma* it will make working or development free of suffering."(T)[44]

Yet Buddhadāsa promises more than a simple absence of suffering as the result of working with cit-wâng. He maintains that work carried out with cit-wâng will be successful - because activity is no longer confused by "I"-"mine" - and that working will be a pleasureable rather than just a neutral or suffering-free experience,

> We will consequently feel successful in our work. That is, the work will go well and the person who does it will be happy and want to work because he or she enjoys working. If we act in this way it is Buddhism or going to the heart of Buddhism.(T)[45]

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[41]**Buddhadāsa**, *Two Kinds of Language*, p.10.

[42]**Phutthathāt**, *Khwām-suk Thǣ Mī Yū Tǣ Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), p.40.

[43]ibid. p.6.

[44]id., "Upasak Hǣng Kān-phœ̄y-phrǣ Tham" ("อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม"), p.18.

[45]id., *Khwām-suk Thǣ Mī Yū Tǣ Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), p.40.

He maintains that spiritual practices and principles should guide and be integrated with worldly activities, including activity associated with socio-economic development,

> Development which gets results must have the *lokuttara* type of *dhamma* integrally governing it. That development will as a consequence be correct and will not proceed to create ongoing crises or to cause corruption.(T)[46]

Buddhadāsa makes no distinction between work defined as a spiritual activity to establish oneself in cit-wāng or as the mundane activities of everyday life and making a living. For him the two amount to the same thing, "Working is the same thing as practising *dhamma*, there are no ways of the world [distinct from] the ways of *dhamma*."(T)[47] This is very much a philosophy of action in the world rather than of withdrawal from mundane activities and simultaneously brings salvation into the world of everyday life while also imbuing mundane work and activities with a religious or sanctified quality. Buddhadāsa does not distinguish between mundane and spiritual activity but only between correct and incorrect activity, a distinction based not on the objective character of an action, such as its location either within or outside the temple precincts, but rather on the psychological attitude which is brought to bear on an action. All actions performed with cit-wāng are regarded as having the same spiritual status on the path to *nibbāna*. Thus in Buddhadāsa's system the "temple" or the site of spiritual practice is no longer a geographical location but a state of mind. This integration of work with spiritual activity is made manifest in the following definition,

> The word "working" [kān-tham-ngān การทำงาน] is Thai. If it were rendered into Pali it would be the word *sammākammanto*, which translates as having right work. When there is right work then it is one component of the Noble Path's [*ariyamagga*] set of practices for advancing towards the blessed *nibbāna*.(T)[48]

By defining work in terms of whether it is carried out with the non-self-centred attitude of cit-wāng or with the self-centred attitude of "I"-"mine", rather than in terms of either its mundane or supramundane character, Buddhadāsa removes Buddhism's negative sanctions against what has historically been seen as the non-spiritual and even anti-spiritual character of mundane activity. The above

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46 id., "Upasak Hāeng Kān-phōey-phrāe Tham" ("อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม"), p.55.

47 id., *Baramatham* ("บรมธรรม"), pp.88-89.

48 id., *Kān-ngān Khȳ Tua khwām-kāw-nā* ("การงานคือตัวความก้าวหน้า" *Working is Progress Itself*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2525 (1982), p.3.

identification of work with the spiritual practice of "right action" or *sammākammanto*, the fourth of the eight injunctions of the Noble Eightfold Path, means that in Buddhadāsa's system mundane work now has the status of a moral injunction. Not only is worldly activity a possible part of the path to *nibbāna*, in Buddhadāsa's system it is an integral and necessary part. In other words, instead of being the antithesis of the state of salvation the mundane socio-cultural world is essential to what Buddhadāsa means by the attinment of salvation. Working, the fundamental activity underlying the industrial mode of production is, according to Buddhadāsa, not simply necessary for socio-economic development but also for spiritual salvation.

The socialist notion that man realises himself through productive labour appears to underlie the following proclamation by Buddhadāsa,

> Humans must act in order to be human ... Working is something sublime, holy, exalted. As for being human, if that which is called work is abandoned we will inevitably lose our correct humanity.(T)[49]

Here "humanity" denotes a state achieved through the spiritual effort of practising cit-wāng. Being "human" or a "man" is not, according to Buddhadāsa, something one is born with but is a state which is attained, "'man' ... refers to the higher qualities implied in the word 'human'."[50] Buddhadāsa implies that we are made human through our work in the world, as practised with cit-wāng. Man as a spiritual being is thus equated with man as economic being because for Buddhadāsa economic activity and spiritual activity cannot be separated without making life pointless and meaningless,

> The world is working and working is the world, life is working and working is life - they are one and the same thing. If we were to live in the world or have a life devoid of working then such a life would be without meaning, it would moreover, to already be dead.(T)[51]

Cit-wāng, when interpreted as being the basis of Buddhist practice, provides the link between Buddhadāsa's spiritual philosophy and his treatment of social and political issues. Cit-wāng incorporates all the diverse concerns of Buddhadāsa's re-interpretative programme. That is, it is a focus of his criticisms of supernaturalist readings of Buddhism and of the separation of lay and clerical forms of the religion,

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[49]ibid. p.5.

[50]Buddhadāsa, *Two Kinds of Language*, p.19.

[51]Phutthathāt, *Khwām-suk Thāē Mī Yū Tāē Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), p.41.

and for his concern to give material and social activity spiritual standing and to grant the Buddhist laity direct access to salvation. Theoretically Buddhadâsa describes cit-wâng as being at the same time a development of the everyday experience of mental calm and the direct precursor of *nibbâna*. That is, cit-wâng is the link between the world of the everyday mundane awareness of the layperson and the supramundane condition of spiritual salvation. According to Buddhadâsa cit-wâng provides the layperson with direct access to *nibbâna*. Similarly, the practice of cit-wâng, or the conscious development of mindfulness or *sati*, is interpreted as being integral to activity and work in the social world. Indeed Buddhadâsa regards working and cit-wâng as being integrally related. Consequently, for Buddhadâsa, cit-wâng is the key to the resolution of the theoretical difficulty of providing a lay-accessible interpretation of both the theory and the practice of doctrinal Buddhism. It is for this reason that just as the theory of phâsâ-tham is the basis of Buddhadâsa's methodological approach to the task of re-interpreting Theravâda Buddhism so is the notion of cit-wâng the conceptual hub of that re-interpreted system.

CHAPTER 7

CIT-WANG AND ZEN.

In order to complete this study of Buddhadāsa's reconstruction of Theravāda doctrine it is necessary to detail his explicitly social and political writings. However, before undertaking this final analysis I wish first to pause in the task of delineating Buddhadāsa's actual re-interpretations in order reflect on some of the theoretical sources of his innovative approaches to Buddhist doctrine. In Chapter Two I proposed that Western rationalism, the growth of science and socio-economic development and changes in the class structure of Thai society have all influenced Buddhadāsa's theoretical innovations. In this chapter, however, I wish to analyse a more specific theoretical influence on Buddhadāsa, namely, the impact of Zen and Mahāyāna Buddhist notions. In the process of detailing the sources of many of his ideas in Zen and Mahāyāna I will also criticise Buddhadāsa's approach to and use of some of his theoretical and literary sources. For while his ideas are undoubtedly theoretically important and also socially significant to modernist Thai Buddhists there are nevertheless flaws in his work which arise from theoretical confusion and, occasionally, from apparently deliberate obfuscation.

Buddhadāsa's interpretation of Theravāda Buddhism, in particular his emphasis on cit-wāng or "freed-mind", has been significantly influenced by the teachings of Zen Buddhism, a school of Mahāyāna Buddhism traditionally found in China, Japan and Vietnam. The Mahāyāna tradition of Buddhism, however, is founded on several fundamentally different notions from those which underpin Theravāda Buddhist doctrine. In terms of metaphysics the most important difference between the two traditions is the Mahāyāna claim that voidness or *s'ūnyatā* (Pali: *suññatā*), as the fundamental character of reality, has a positive character and is not the ontological void or emptiness generally denoted by the parallel Theravāda notion of *anattā* (Sanskrit: *anātman*). The Mahāyāna proposition that the "void" is in fact not empty but an originating "fullness" which forms the undifferentiated substrate of all existence is presented in Zen teachings as an intellectual paradox whose truth can only be realised by a transcendence of mundane rationality. Zen masters have

historically emphasised the penetration of paradoxical statements, called *koan*, as an important meditative tool in striving to attain such transcendent spiritual awareness. The Theravâda tradition contains no explicit doctrines of the fundamentally paradoxical nature of reality, instead presenting the basic teachings of Buddhism, including that of *anattā* or non-self, as unambiguous descriptions of the actual character of existence. Soteriologically Mahāyāna Buddhism differs from Theravâda in its acceptance of the ability of spiritually advanced personalities to directly assist the spiritual enlightenment of others by acts of grace. On the other hand salvation in Theravâda Buddhism is a wholly individually attained condition.

In utilising Zen and Mahāyāna notions in his reform of Theravâda doctrine Buddhadâsa must come to terms with the important doctrinal differences mentioned above in order to justify his borrowing of non-Theravâda ideas. He does this in several ways, such as by claiming that Zen is not in fact part of the Mahāyāna tradition but rather represents a return to the fundamental core of Buddhism which has relevance for all Buddhists of all traditions and backgrounds. However, Buddhadâsa's main justification for employing Zen-derived ideas is contained in his attempts to demonstrate the existence of similarities and even identities between the Zen ideas that he borrows and undeniably Theravâda notions and teachings. However, these arguments are often weak and in places rely upon misinterpretations of Zen notions and upon managed readings of Zen texts which avoid detailing points which show up the actual differences between Theravâda and Mahāyāna doctrine. The failings of Buddhadâsa's justifications of his use of Zen ideas (presented in order to avoid criticisms of heterodoxy from within the Thai *saṅgha*) do not, however, ultimately detract from the significance of his Zen-influenced re-interpretations of Theravâda doctrine. Whether or not his ideas strictly follow Theravâda notions Buddhadâsa still remains faithful to what he interprets as the spirit of Buddhist doctrines. And it is this emphasis on the broader principles of Buddhist teachings rather than on scriptural details which has allowed him to re-invigorate the theoretically stagnant Theravâda tradition by introducing views and concepts from other Buddhist traditions.

7.1 The Teachings of Zen Buddhism.

Blofeld describes the central tenets of Zen Buddhism as follows: Zen,

> submits that, while all Buddhist sects present the truth in varying degrees, Zen alone preserves the very highest teaching of all - a teaching based on a mysterious transmission of Mind which took place between Gautama Buddha and Mahākāṣyapa, the only one of his disciples capable

of receiving this transmission.[1]

Zen emphasises that the central teaching of Buddhism cannot be caught within an intellectual web of words but is a mystical, wordless doctrine whose truth is realised directly and immediately rather than approached gradually through a systematic gradation of practices as in Theravâda Buddhism. This truth beyond words, in which the intellectual polarities of everyday consciousness and rationality dissolve, is variously called the "void", *s'ūnyatā*, "Mind" or "One Mind"[2]. To the intellect this truth is impenetrable, and so a conceptual void, but Zen teachers maintain that it is yet the source of all being, a substrate of Mind upon which all phenomenal existence is grounded. The Zen scholar Suzuki describes this Mind as being that,

> from which this universe with all its multiplicities issues, but which is itself simple, undefiled and illuminating as the sun behind the clouds.[3]

In Zen enlightenment, or *satori* in Japanese, is an all or nothing experience - one either intuits Mind or One Mind **in toto** in a single flash of liberative insight or not at all. Nevertheless, Zen still teaches that one can only prepare the mind for its sudden realisation of truth through meditation and it is the from the practice of *dhyāna* meditation (Chinese: chān, Japanese: Zen) that the sect in Japan takes its name.

According to tradition the wordless doctrine or direct spiritual insight of the Buddha first passed to Mahākāṣyapa (Pali: Mahākassapa) and from him to Ananda, who became the second of twenty eight patriarchs who received the wordless doctrine in an unbroken line of succession. The last Indian patriarch, Bodhidharma, is traditionally regarded as having gone to China in the sixth century of the Christian era, becoming the first of six Chinese patriarchs, the last of whom was Hui Neng (also called Wei Lang). Subsequent divisions in the sect broke the direct line of spiritual succession.

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[1] John **Blofeld** (trans), *The Zen Teachings of Huang Po - On the Transmission of Mind*, Grove Press, New York, 1958, p.8.

[2] The Chinese term which Blofeld translates as "One Mind" has almost as many renderings into English as there have been translators of Zen texts. Wang Mou-lam, translator of *The Sutra of Wei Lang (or Hui Neng)* (Westport Conn., 1973.) says the original Chinese term denotes "Self-nature" but nevertheless chooses to render it by "Essence of Mind". Suzuki, on the other hand, drawing on the Japanese tradition, variously uses the terms "Mind" or "No-mind".

[3] Daisetz Teitaro **Suzuki**, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind - The Significance of the Sutra of Hui-Neng (Wei-Lang)*, Rider & Co., London, 1949, p.23.

7.2 Buddhadāsa's Justification for Borrowing Zen Notions.

Buddhadāsa in no way hides his indebtedness to Zen and by explicitly supporting Zen teachings opens himself to the criticism of being an apostate to his Theravāda roots. The Theravāda *saṅgha* has historically regarded itself as the bearer of the true Buddhist doctrine and practice, on the argument that its traditions and scriptures can be traced back further than those of any other existing Buddhist school. The Theravādins have been highly protective of their "purer" tradition and extremely wary of its pollution with Mahāyāna doctrines. Buddhadāsa's critics correctly regard the pivotal notion of cit-wāng as a Thai equivalent of *s'ūnyatā* or void, but mistakenly claim that this is solely a Mahāyāna and not a Theravāda concept. Phra Kittiwutthō says,

> This Theravāda section of Buddhism does not talk about cit-wāng. In the *Tipiṭaka* ... nothing at all is indicated about the matter of cit-wāng. The Buddha's words in Pali show nothing like it ... cit-wāng is a matter outside of the blessed *Tipiṭaka*. It is not a principle of this pure Theravāda section of Buddhism but is an opinion of the Mahāyānists.(T)[4]

Buddhadāsa defends himself against such criticisms by claiming that cit-wāng, "is the heart of all Buddhism, [having existed] since before the separation into Theravāda or Mahāyāna."(T)[5] And in opposition to critics like Kittiwutthō Buddhadāsa claims that *suññatā* is not only a term used by the Buddha but that in the *Dhammadinna Sutta* the Buddha calls it the basis or heart of Buddhist practice. Buddhadāsa also cites other *suttas* as providing support for his emphasis on *suññatā* and on cit-wāng. He maintains that in the *Mahāvāra Vagga* of the *Saṁyutta Nikāya* the Buddha says,

> Emptiness [*suññatā*] is what I teach. A teaching that does not treat of emptiness is someone else's teaching, an unorthodox teaching composed by some later disciple.[6]

And he quotes the Buddha as saying in the *Pañcaka Nipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that,

> A discourse of any kind, though produced by a poet or a learned man, versified, poetical, splendid, melodious in sound and syllable is not in

[4](Phra) **Kittiwutthō**, pp.128-130.

[5]**Phutthathāt**, *Khwām-suk Thāē Mī Yū Tāē Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), p.33.

[6]**Buddhadāsa**, *Buddha-dhamma for Students*, p.68.

keeping with the teaching [of the Buddha] if not connected with *suññatā*.[7]

After claiming that cit-wāng is at the heart of Buddhism Buddhadāsa also attempts to further weaken Kittiwutthō's attack by saying, "True Buddhism is neither Theravāda nor Mahāyāna."(T)[8] And he opens the way for the further incorporation of Mahāyāna ideas into Theravāda by saying that, "We should not regard Zen as being Mahāyāna."(T)[9] This last claim is in fact based on a rather narrow and religiously chauvinistic definition of Mahāyāna Buddhism as being concerned more with the worship of Mahāyāna saints or *bodhisattvas* than with following the practical teachings of the Buddha. Buddhadāsa attempts to show that Zen does not fit this narrow definition and so should not be called a part of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Despite the narrow character of this definition of Mahāyāna Buddhism used by Buddhadāsa in supporting his case for borrowing Zen notions it must nevertheless be acknowledged that this is the same definition used by his critics when they raise the spectre of the purported purity of Theravāda being subverted by the introduction of Mahāyāna teachings. And so, inasmuch as Buddhadāsa is here conducting a polemical rather than a scholarly debate, his demonstration of the supposedly non-Mahāyāna character of Zen can be regarded as politically expeditious even if it is theoretically superficial. In trying to dissociate his borrowing of Zen notions from what most Thai Buddhists regard as being Mahāyāna Buddhadāsa claims that,

> The Zen sect arose in order to ridicule those Mahāyānists who worship only [the *bodhisattvas*] Amitābha and Avalokites'vāra with pleadings and implorings.(T)[10]

Here Buddhadāsa is saying that Zen criticises the same ritualistic faith which Theravādins fault in popular Mahāyāna practice. However, he does not acclaim Zen as being any better or as having any more insights than Theravāda,

> Zen is not any better than the type of Buddhism we already have ... Zen is interesting. Whoever studies it well must become more intelligent than

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[7]ibid.

[8]**Phutthathāt**, *Khwām-suk Thāē Mī Yū Tāē Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), p.33.

[9] id. (trans), *Kham-sōrn Khōrng Hūang Pō* ("คำสอนของฮวงโป" *The Teachings of Huang Po*), Samnak-nangsӯ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2520 (1977), p.1.

[10] id., , *Cit-praphatsorn - Cit-dōēm-thāē - Cit-wāng - Mӯan-kan Rӯ Yāng-rai?* ("จิตประภัสสร – จิตเดิมแท้ – จิตว่าง เหมือนกันหรือ."), p.13.

before.(T)[11]

It has been Buddhadāsa's own translations into Thai of various Zen works[12] which has led to the popularisation of that sect's ideas among a formerly uninterested Thai readership. And in the introduction to one of those translations, *The Teachings of Huang Po*, he appeals to his audience's modernist aspirations by saying that while the work is the acme of Zen Buddhist thought it is still largely unknown in Thailand, and if they do not acquaint themselves with it, "Thai Buddhists will be said to be behind the times."(T)[13]

7.3 Zen Influences on the Notion of Cit-wāng.

It is not the specific term *suññatā* which Buddhadāsa has borrowed from Zen, for as already seen this term does occur in the Pali canon. Rather, it is the view that cit-wāng is the fundamental state of mind which has been taken from the Zen school. Suzuki quotes the Zen master Hui Neng as saying the following on this point,

> Mind as it is in itself is free from ills ... The Mind as it is in itself is free from disturbances ... The Mind as it is in itself is free from follies.[14]

Blofeld, whose English translation of Huang Po's teachings was in turn translated into Thai by Buddhadāsa, says that Zen refutes the view,

> that the mind is a mirror to be cleansed of the defiling dust of

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[11] id., *Chāw Phut Thī Dī Yŏrm Pen Khrit Thī Dī* ("ชาวพุทธที่ดีย่อมเป็นคริสต์ที่ดี" *A Good Buddhist is Naturally a Good Christian*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2523 (1980), p.13.

[12] The most important Zen texts translated into Thai by Buddhadāsa are:

(i.) *The Zen Teachings of Huang Po - On the Transmission of Mind*, John Blofeld (trans), Grove Press, New York, 1958. Translated as *Kham-sŏrn Khŏrng Hūang Pŏ* ("คำสอนของฮวงโป" *The Teachings of Huang Po*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2520 (1977).

(ii.) *The Sutra of Wei Lang (or Hui Neng)*, Wang Mou-lam (trans), Christmas Humphries (ed), no publisher given, Westport Conn., 1973. Translated as *Sūt Khŏrng Wōey Lāng* ("สูตรของเว่ยหล่าง" *The Sutra of Wei Lang*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2520 (1977).

As is common in Thailand today most translations into Thai are from English originals or English versions of texts.

[13] **Phutthathāt**, *Kham-sŏrn Khŏrng Hūang Pŏ* ("คำสอนของฮวงโป"), p.1.

[14] Daisetz Teitaro **Suzuki**, *Zen and Japanese Buddhism*, Japan Travel Centre, Tokyo, 1958, pp.19-20.

> phenomena, passion and other illusions, for this view leads to dualism ... the dust and the mirror are one intangible unity.[15]

Another Zen master, Hui Neng, taught the paradoxical doctrine that *nirvāṇa* or salvation is the same as *saṁsāra* or the cycle of suffering and rebirth from which liberation is sought. Hui Neng taught that defilements are the same as pure Mind, and that to distinguish between these polarities is to be caught in the delusory net of dichotomous thinking. Hui Neng then sought not to end defilements or the cycle of *saṁsāra* but rather the polarised way of thinking in which *nirvāṇa* is distinguished from *saṁsāra*, and in which *kleṣa* (Pali: *kilesa*) or mental defilements are considered distinct from pure Mind. According to Hui Neng mental defilements and the suffering of rebirth are all essentially the same as Mind or One Mind.

Buddhadāsa adopts a view similar to Hui Neng's on the fundamental purity of the mind when he criticses some *Abhidhamma* scholars as holding that,

> people fundamentally have *kilesa*. That is that the mind is fundamentally disturbed. They then try to extract *kilesa* in order to abolish them.(T)[16]

It follows from the doctrine of *anattā* that even *kilesa* such as ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*), despite their great power to obstruct the attainment of *nibbāna*, are non-essential and dependent phenomena. The dependent nature of *avijjā* is detailed in the *Avijjā Sutta*[17] where it is stated that *avijjā* has the *pañcanivaraṇa* or five hindrances of lust, ill will, sloth, restlessness and anxiety as its "food" or dependent sources of origination. These five hindrances are further described as having three kinds of *ducarita* or bad conduct as their "food", while lacking control of the senses is in turn given as the "food" of *ducarita*. The list of dependent causes then proceeds through many successive stages[18]. This means, as Chinda Chandrkaew states, that,

> Inspite of the fact that in the causal formula of Dependent Origination [*paṭiccasamuppāda*] *avijjā* is first mentioned ... the attempt to interpret

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[15]**Blofeld**, p.78n.

[16]**Phutthathāt**, *Khwām-suk Thāē Mī Yū Tāē Nai Ngān* ("ความสุขแท้มีอยู่แต่ในงาน"), p.36.

[17]*Avijjā Sutta*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Vol.24/verse61/p.103.

[18]The "food" of lacking control of the senses is in turn lacking the mindfulness called *satisampajañña*, whose "food" is given as not being mentally clever or ingenious. The "food" or source of a lack of mental cleverness is lacking faith or *saddhā*, whose "food" is not listening to the true teaching or *saccadhamma*, whose "food" is not meeting with a person established in truth, a *sappurisa*.

> *avijjā* as the first principle or cause, out of which everything comes, cannot be sustained.[19]

But despite the above scriptural description of *avijjā* as being a compounded or dependent phenomenon ignorance is nevertheless still popularly hypostatised as a self-existing evil, personified by the demonic figure of *Māra*. Phra Achān Mahā Boowa Nyanasampanno, the biographer of Acharn Mun, reflects this popular view of *avijjā* when he says,

> Ignorance is clever, not only in its defensive manouevres whereby it is adroitly evasive, but also in aggressive strategy, whereby it can launch a surprise attack on its opponent with devastating results.[20]

Like Hui Neng Buddhadāsa opposes this hypostatisation of ignorance and mental defilements, saying that the attitude of attacking *avijjā* and other *kilesa* is to deludedly confer on them a substantial character which as impermanent, dependent phenomena they do not possess. He instead proposes using mindfulness or *sati* to prevent the necessary conditions for *kilesa*, such as *avijjā*, from arising, that is, to remain in the original state of cit-wāng.

7.4 Confusions in Buddhadāsa's Use of Zen Notions.

But while agreeing with the Zen doctrine that the mind is fundamentally pure and that attacking defilements is the wrong way to attain enlightenment Buddhadāsa's reasons for holding these views in fact differ from the Zen injunctions to avoid thinking in terms of rational polarities. And indeed despite the superficial similarities between Zen teachings and his own views Buddhadāsa creates confusions in his work by not clearly acknowledging the differences between his outlook and that of Zen.

A fundamental confusion arises from Buddhadāsa's identification of his notion of cit-wāng with the Zen idea of One Mind or Original Mind. For while Buddhadāsa's entire interpretation of Theravāda doctrine rests upon a reduction of purported supernatural phenomena to psychological states the Zen teaching of One Mind, unlike the notion of cit-wāng, has an explicitly ontological component. This contrasts sharply with both Buddhadāsa's and the traditional Theravāda view of *anattā*. Blofeld notes a Zen criticism of the Theravāda view of *anattā*, a view which Buddhadāsa strongly supports,

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[19] **Chandrkaew**, p.50.

[20] (Phra Acharn Maha) **Boowa** Nyanasampanno, p.115.

> If the Theravādins are right with their "no ego and no Self", what is it that re-incarnates and finally enters *nirvāṇa*? ... For if the temporarily adhering aggregates of personality are not held together by an ego-soul or by a Universal Self or the One Mind, whatever enters *nirvāṇa* when those aggregates have finally dispersed can be of no interest to the man who devotes successive lives to attaining that goal.[21]

Buddhadāsa avoids this ontological problem posed by Blofeld (i.e. what is it that re-incarnates and ultimately attains *nibbāna*?) by defining the scope of Buddhism as covering only the psychological domain of this life on earth. As it will be recalled Buddhadāsa re-interprets rebirth as denoting the continual re-arising of ego-centredness or "I"-"mine". In contrast, Mahāyānists explicitly maintain that there is a transcendent "Self", the One Mind, pre-existing all things and which is the pure, unsullied ontological foundation of reality. This Mahāyāna notion is totally different from the de-ontologised idea of cit-wāng, which Buddhadāsa maintains is the same as the Zen notion of One Mind. Cit-wāng is a basic, undefiled mental condition while the Zen One Mind is not only a fundamental mental state but is also regarded as being the basic mental substrate. Buddhadāsa, on the other hand, eschews all discussion of substrates and of fundamental substances as soteriologically irrelevant.

In a previous chapter I noted that Buddhadāsa does not deny that non-conscious mental impurities, *anusayakilesa*, continue to exist even in some saintly personalities who are established in cit-wāng. From this I concluded that cit-wāng, which Buddhadāsa defines as the fundamental mental condition, must denote the basic state of the **conscious** mind. This is because if cit-wāng is not restricted to being a description of the conscious mind it would contradict the proposition that there are *anusaya* or latent, non-conscious *kilesa* or mental defilements. In contrast, however, the Zen One Mind, as the source of all being, is much more than a state of consciousness. That is, cit-wāng, as a condition of the conscious mind, is not at all the same thing as the all-encompassing character of the Zen One Mind, and Buddhadāsa's attempt to identify the two only creates confusion as to the actual character of cit-wāng, and of One Mind.

Buddhadāsa's work is also confused by his equation of the Zen notion of *s'ūnyatā* with the concept of wāng or cit-wāng. As noted above cit-wāng denotes a mental state which is freed or emptied of defilements. In contrast, however, the Zen and the Mahāyāna notion of *s'ūnyatā* is of an all-pervasive, underlying principle of reality which, while being an absolute void in which all dualities are abolished,

[21] Blofeld, pp.109-110n.

paradoxically also has a positive quality of being the "essence" of being. Neither cit-wàng nor the Theravàda notion of *suññatà* can be described as paradoxical. Both denote a void or absence of psychological and moral defilements rather than of conceptual dualities. The Theravāda concept of *suññatà* underpinning Buddhadàsa's notion of cit-wàng straightforwardly describes phenomena as being characterised by *anattà* or non-essentialitity. The Zen *s'ùnyatà* on the other hand is a much more absolute philosophical notion than either the Theravāda *suññatà* or the psychological condition of cit-wàng.

In attempting to identify cit-wāng with what Blofeld translates as One Mind Buddhadāsa maintains that the original Chinese expression for the term Mind is in fact ambiguous in that it could be rendered as either "original mind" or "true mind". He decides to translate it as "true original mind", cit-dōem-thāė (จิตเดิมแท้), and admits that,

> These words, "original mind" or "true original mind" are found in the Dhyāna Sect [i.e. Zen]. They don't occur in our Theravāda Sect.(T)[22]

However, Buddhadāsa goes on to equate this Zen notion of "true original mind" with the Theravāda Pali term *pabhassara* (Sanskrit: *prabhāsvara*, Thai: praphatsorn ประภัสสร), literally "to shine very brightly", saying that like "true original mind" this denotes the original mental state which is free from unwholesome defilements,

> The mind is naturally *pabhassara*. That is, it is without *kilesa* and is not saddened or clouded because of *kilesa*. That original mind shines as *pabhassara* but when *kilesa* enter it changes into a [morally] clouded mind.(T)[23]

In an article comparing Zen and Theravāda Walpola Rahula refers to this same term of *pabhassara* as demonstrating the existence of a link between the two schools. Rahula offers the following explanation of the Zen symbolism of a black ox which through taming and training gradually becomes white,

> The underlying idea is that the mind, which is naturally pure, is polluted by extraneous impurities and that it could and should be cleansed through discipline and meditation.
>
> There are in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* [*Aṅg.* I (PTS), p.10] two very important and essential *suttas* which serve as an index to the concept of

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[22] **Phutthathāt**, *Cit-praphatsorn - Cit-dōem-thāė - Cit-wāng - Mȳan-kan Rȳ Yāng-rai?*, ("จิตประภัสสร – จิตเดิมแท้ – จิตว่าง เหมือนกัน."), p.12.

[23] id., *Ōsārētapphatham* (โอสาเรตัพพธรรม), p.226.

the black ox gradually becoming white. One *sutta* says: *Pabhassaram idaṁ bhikkhave attaṁ, tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṁ.* ("Bhikkhus, this mind is luminous and it is defiled by adventitious defilements.") The other one says: *Pabhassaram idaṁ bhikkhave attaṁ, tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṁ.*("Bhikkhus, this mind is luminous and it is freed from adventitious defilements.").[24]

That is, there is in fact a Theravāda scriptural basis for Buddhadāsa's view that the mind is originally pure and only "adventitiously", that is incidentally, and not fundamentally defiled. Rahula goes on to note that the Pali term *pabhassara* is found in its Sanskrit form *prabhāsvara* in the important Zen text, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, where mind is described as *prakṛti-prabhāsvara*, "luminous by nature", a description which is paired with *prakṛti-paris'uddhi*, "pure by nature". Thus in addition to having some basis in the Theravāda canon Buddhadāsa's view that mind in originally pure also bears some relation to the Zen view. But despite these scriptural precedents for Buddhadāsa's interpretation of cit-wāng as denoting *pabhassara* or the Zen "true original mind", it is nevertheless still the case that cit-wāng is an incomplete rendering of the Zen notion of Mind. As Blofeld notes,

> Zen adepts, like their fellow Mahāyānists, take *anātman* to imply, "no entity to be termed an ego", nought but the One Mind, which comprises all things and gives them their reality.[25]

Buddhadāsa's interpretation of *anattā* as cit-wāng, or the absence of the self-centredness of "I"-"mine", catches the Zen emphasis on the absence of ego as a psychological function but not the Zen view of the lack of an entity of the self. Buddhadāsa nowhere talks in terms of entities or of the mind or "Mind" as a basis of reality.

The spiritual goal of Zen is identification with the "void" or the One Mind, as is expressed in the following excerpt from a Vietnamese Zen manual for which Buddhadāsa has significant regard,

> People normally cut reality into sections and divide it into compartments, and so are unable to see the interdependence of all phenomena. To see one in all and all in one is to break through the great barrier which Buddhism calls the attachment to the false view of self ... We are life and life without limits ... If our lives have no limits, the assembly of the five aggregates [*khandhas*] which makes up ourself also has no limits. The impermanent character of the universe, the success and failures of life can no longer manipulate us. Having seen the reality of interdependence and

[24] Walpola Rahula, "Zen and the Taming of the Bull", in Walpola Rahula (ed), *Zen and the Taming of the Bull - Towards the Re-definition of Buddhist Thought*, Gordon Fraser, London, 1978, pp.16-17.

[25] Blofeld, p.110n.

penetrated deeply into its reality, nothing can oppress you any longer.[26]

This emphasis on loss of self through identification with One Mind is absent from Theravâda, and from Buddhadâsa's writings. Buddhadâsa defines *anattâ* quite differently as the absence of the defiling or immoral quality of self-centredness, and he mistakenly represents **this** as being the central teaching of Zen,

> The Chinese Buddhist Sect of Zen teaches us to live without needing to have a self ... to eat without there needing to be an eater, to work without there needing to be a doer. That is, to have a mind suffused with wisdom.(T)[27]

In the introduction to his Thai translation of the work of the Zen master Huang Po Buddhadâsa does uncritically mention the ontological Zen view of One Mind, "All beings are the same thing as that which is One Mind, or is the Buddha."(T)[28] But He does not present this interpretation in any other of his writings and even in the same introduction from which the above statement is taken he shifts from Zen's ontological view to his own Theravâda-based, psychological and moral interpretation of One Mind as being equivalent to *suññatâ*, and thus to cit-wâng, "One Mind has a meaning equivalent to being freed from all distracting things."(T)[29]

When further explaining Huang Po's ideas Buddhadâsa says that before birth, "One Mind already exists: no-one knows how long it has been in existence."(T)[30] Huang Po means by this that One Mind is the pre-existing ground of all being, while it must be recalled that for Buddhadâsa "birth" means the arising of the self-centred sense of "I"-"mine" or of ego-centredness, a psychological rather than a metaphysical phenomenon. Thus in phâsâ-tham terms to say that One Mind exists before "birth" is, in contradistinction with the Zen view, simply to say that cit-wâng is the mental state which pre-exists the arising of self-centred defilements.

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[26]**Thich Nhat Hanh**, *The Miracle of Being Awake*, trans. Mobi Quynh Hoa, ed. Jim Forest, Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, Bangkok, 1976, p.36.

[27]**Phutthathât**, *Nipphân Phon Samay Pai Lǣw Rȳ* ("นิพพานพ้นสมัยไปแล้วหรือ"), p.10.

[28]id., *Kham-sôrn Khôrng Hūang Pō* ("คำสอนของฮวงโป"), p.3.

[29]ibid. p.6.

[30]ibid. p.3.

7.5 Differences Between the Theravâda *Nibbâna* and the Zen *Satori*.

There is a further significant difference between Theravâda and Zen, in their respective accounts of enlightenment, *nibbâna* and *satori*. Buddhadâsa implies that both Theravâda and Zen aim for the same goal. However, not all Theravâda scholars agree that the spiritual goals of the two traditions are in fact identical. After a study of the respective scriptural descriptions of *satori* and *nibbâna* a Sri Lankan scholar monk, Bhikkhu Ananda, concludes that,

> though the description of one who has attained *satori* and *nirvāṇa* may seem similar, yet, however, the attributes belonging to one who has attained *nirvāṇa* are never heard of nor mentioned of the person who has attained *satori* in Zen.[31]

Differences arise from the ways in which Zen and Theravâda adepts respectively attain their ideal states. *Nibbâna* is something attained through individual moral and meditative practice while, ideally, the Zen enlightenment or *satori* is regarded as a special transmission from the mind of the teacher to the mind of the aspirant. Unlike in Theravâda a teacher is therefore essential in Zen not only for instruction in meditative practices but also for the actual attainment of enlightenment. The Zen teaching that this mind-to-mind enlightenment is sudden also differs from the Theravâda emphasis on meditation as leading one gradually closer and closer to *nibbâna*. Suzuki says of Zen, "That the process of enlightenment is abrupt means that there is a leap, logical and psychological, in the Buddhist experience."[32] This is completely at odds with Buddhadâsa's interpretation of <u>cit-wâng</u>, and *nibbâna*, as being continuous with and developing out of everyday experiences of mental calm.

Thus while Buddhadâsa often refers to Zen teachings, claiming Zen doctrines to be compatible with if not identical to Theravâda doctrine, the view of Zen he presents is heavily coloured by Theravâda notions. In fact Buddhadâsa's misinterpretation of the Zen notion of One Mind shows that, contrary to Kittiwutthô's claims, he is not an apostate to Theravâda Buddhism. Buddhadâsa misinterprets Zen notions precisely because he keeps to Theravâda's non-ontological principles. Kittiwutthô's criticism is misplaced for while Buddhadâsa's emphasis on <u>cit-wâng</u> and *suññatâ* has its source in Zen his actual interpretation of <u>cit-wâng</u> in fact remains strictly within the bounds of Theravâda orthodoxy. Buddhadâsa nowhere introduces the ontological import of the Zen notions of *s'ùnyatâ* and One Mind.

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[31](Bhikkhu) Ananda, p.24.

[32]Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*, p.53.

Rather than actually introducing Zen ideas into Theravâda Buddhism Buddhadâsa has instead used Zen terms and Zen-like arguments to justify a shift of emphasis **within** Theravâda doctrine. While he tends to use language which has a strong Zen flavour he does not in fact reject or replace any Theravâda position with its opposed Zen view. Instead of introducing actual Mahâyâna or Zen notions into Theravâda Buddhism Buddhadâsa draws on Zen to create a new terminology to differentiate his particular interpretative emphasis from the traditionally accepted versions of Theravâda in Thailand. This borrowing of Zen terms and idioms gives Buddhadâsa's work a Zen-like appearance while also obscuring the fact that his interpretations of cit-wâng, *suññatâ* and *nibbâna* are in fact continuous with Theravâda tradition rather than being an "heretical" acceptance of Mahâyâna teachings.

7.6 Buddhadâsa's Management of Zen Scriptures.

However, Buddhadâsa's "sanitisation" of Zen in order to make it fit better with his version of Theravâda extends beyond subtly eliding the ontological implications of terms such as One Mind and *s'ûnyatâ*, and avoiding discussing the differences between *satori* and *nibbâna*. In translating Blofeld's book on Hui Neng into Thai Buddhadâsa also omits some sections which show Zen criticisms of Theravâda doctrines. For example, while including most of Blofeld's footnotes in his own translation Buddhadâsa leaves out the following note on the term *s'ràvaka*, found on page thirty nine of the English translation,

> Huang Po sometimes stretches this term to imply Hinayânists [i.e. Theravâdins] in general ... Huang Po implies that Hinayânists pay too much attention to the literal meaning of the scriptures, instead of seeking intuitive knowledge through eliminating conceptual thought.[33]

Buddhadâsa also omits large sections of the second part of Blofeld's translation called, "The Wan Ling Record of the Zen Master Huang Po (Tuan Chi)". Section thirty seven of the Wan Ling Record in Blofeld's English version contains the warning, "If you accept the doctrine of *anâtman* [Pali: *anattà*] the concept '*anâtman*' may land you among the Theravâdins."[34] This is a Zen criticism of Theravâdins' purported attachment to intellectualisms and to the precise linguistic meaning of the term "non-self", rather than attempting to go beyond the intellectual polarities of whether there is or is not a self in order to penetrate to transcendent truth itself.

[33]**Blofeld**, p.39n.

[34]ibid. Section 37 of "Wan Ling Record of the Zen Master Huang Po".

It is not immediately clear why Buddhadāsa should manage his sources in order to artificially create an appearance of compatibility between Zen and Theravāda doctrine. It is also unclear why he overlooks the ontological assumptions underpinning the Zen and Mahāyāna teachings on One Mind when he is in contrast so critical of the ontological beliefs in spirits, demons and heavens of his fellow Thai Buddhists. These inaccuracies, confusions and the straightforward avoidance of troublesome aspects of the Zen scriptures may, however, result from religio-political constraints. It is clear that Buddhadāsa sees much in Zen that he feels is both of value to Thai Buddhism and compatible with Theravāda principles. However, in the purist and intellectually xenophobic atmosphere of the Thai *saṅgha* he perhaps feels it necessary to justify his enthusiasm for Zen by maintaining that there is an absolute identity between Theravāda and the Japanese school. Because his view of Buddhism is clearly unconventional within the conservative Theravāda tradition in Thailand, which is in general intolerant of radical innovation in either practice or teaching, Buddhadāsa seeks to avoid portraying himself as an innovator and as a doctrinal renegade by constantly putting forward precedents for his ideas. Nevertheless, that the precedents Buddhadāsa draws on must in several cases be taken from outside Theravāda (in the Zen and Mahāyāna traditions) indicates the actual degree of the innovativeness and unconventionality of his ideas. In the face of the novelty of his views on Theravāda doctrine and the often intransigent conservatism of his critics, and of the Thai *saṅgha* hierarchy, Buddhadāsa takes the extreme position of **identifying** his central notion of <u>cit-wāṅg</u> with Zen ideas of One Mind and *s'ūnyatā*, even though this requires a stretching and management of the Zen sources. Any admission of inconsistencies or incompatibilities between Zen and Theravāda might be seen by Buddhadāsa as providing his conservative critics with a theoretical stick with which to beat him. Buddhadāsa may fear that any self-admitted chink in the armour of his arguments might be used to pull down the entire edifice of his reformist enterprise.

However, the sources of the inconsistencies in Buddhadāsa's use and treatment of Zen materials and notions remain speculative. But given the intellectual ardour and capability systematically expressed in Buddhadāsa's work I am reluctant to attribute the various inconsistencies noted above to either a simple intellectual slip or to deliberate duplicity. I am more inclined to the view that the inadequacies in his treatment of Zen result from religio-political pressures to maintain an appearance of absolute conformity to Theravāda principles and traditions.

7.7 Salvation Here and Now - The Zen Influence on Buddhadāsa.

While the version of Zen described by Buddhadāsa as important for modernist Thais to know and appreciate is a particularly Theravāda interpretation there is no denying the significant influence of various aspects of Zen doctrine on his work. It is not only terminology and literary styles that Buddhadāsa has borrowed but also aspects of the ethic or approach of Zen to the quest for enlightenment. Buddhadāsa finds a soulmate in such Zen authors as Suzuki who writes, "Zen disregards conventionalism, ritualism, institutionalism, in fact anything that is binding and restricting."[35] He finds in Zen a kind of Buddhism with the common goal of cutting through the accumbrances of past interpretations of the scriptures by returning to the practical core of the religion.

There are also specific emphases of interpretation borrowed from Zen without which Buddhadāsa would not have been able to develop his radical, modernist interpretation of Theravāda. For example, the doctrine that cit-wāng is the fundamental mental state (as already seen an idea borrowed, with variations, from the Zen teaching of One Mind) has important implications regarding whether human existence on earth is seen as essentially involving suffering or as only conditionally being inadequate, and so potentially subject to amelioration and betterment. Traditional Theravāda teachings equates material existence with being caught in *saṁsāra*, the cycle of rebirth and suffering, and maintain that the mere association of mind or *nāma* with the physical or bodily factors of existence, *rūpa*, is the compounded state of existence of *saṅkhāra*, which the Buddha taught underlay all suffering. It is a necessary conclusion of this interpretation that the mind can never be totally free of defilements or the causes of suffering so long as it is associated with the material factors of the body. Mere association with the material world is regarded as a defiling experience. In criticisng Buddhadāsa Anan Sēnākhan summarises this traditional interpretation as follows,

> Insofar as *nāmarūpa* [the compound of mind and body factors] yet remain there must be compounding [*saṅkhāra*] and when there is compounding it is *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* ... When there is *nāmarūpa* there must be arising and passing away. When there is arising and passing away that itself means there is *vaṭṭasaṁsāra*. Where there is *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* there cannot be *nibbāna* because *nibbāna* is devoid of *nāmarūpa*, devoid of compounding, it is *asaṅkhatadhamma* [unconditioned].(T)[36]

The compounding of *nāma* and *rūpa* (i.e. of mental factors and materiality) is

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[35]**Suzuki,** *Zen and Japanese Buddhism*, p.33.

[36]**Anan** Sēnākhan, *Khamsōrn Dīarathī* ("คำสอนเดียรถีย์ p.67.

traditionally regarded as leading to the cycle of birth and death, becoming and unbecoming, which in turn is regarded as leading to suffering. And so according to this traditional view any compounded state (i.e. any embodied state) cannot attain *nibbāna* because embodiment necessarily entails the suffering which is the antithesis of *nibbāna*. Buddhadāsa completely disagrees with this traditional view. For him *saṅkhāra* or compounding is not essentially the relation of body to mind but rather is the purely psychological attachment of volition and consciousness to the objects of desire. Buddhadāsa conceives of compounding as the association of consciousness with cravings which grow from delusion and ignorance. In phāsā-tham *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* is consequently interpreted as the psychological cycle of suffering resulting from the arising or "birth" of the deluded outlook of ego-centredness, "I"-"mine". Buddhadāsa maintains that, "At whatever moment the mind is not compounded with 'I'-'mine' there is no *vaṭṭasaṁsāra*."(T)[37] In phāsā-tham *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* is not an ontological condition, as it is for Anan, but a psychological state which is not fundamentally characteristic of human mental life but rather only arises periodically, when delusion and desire compound with consciousness,

> Whenever the mind has compounding [*saṅkhāra*] boiling and gushing up it is *vaṭṭasaṁsāra*. Whenever there is no compounding and the mind remains in original peace it is *nibbāna*.(T)[38]

Rājavaramuni also considers this problem of material existence and suffering, and offers an interpretation similar to Buddhadāsa's. He notes that if the mind is still pervaded by *kilesa* then the process of perception will be "tainted". Perceptual consciousness or *saññā* tainted with the defilements of attachment and ignorance is an obstacle to salvation from suffering because, being imbued with ignorance, it cannot attain the clear and objective perception of reality as transient and non-essential which is necessary for salvation. Rājavaramuni calls this defilement-tainted consciousness *papañcsaññā* or *kilesasaññā*, which is, "*saññā* [perception] that arises from *kilesa* or is combined with *kilesa*."(T)[39] Rājavaramuni also observes that it is this *kilesa*-infected knowledge or delusion, *moha*, which is the energy of *saṁsāravaṭṭa*, the cycle of suffering as detailed in the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. But he maintains the process of perception, founded as it is in the materiality of the senses,

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[37] Phutthathāt, *Nai Wattasongsān Mī Nipphān* ("ในวัฏฏสงสารมีนิพพาน" *In Saṁsāra There is Nibbāna*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2524 (1981), p.10.

[38] ibid. p.7.

[39] (Phra) Rātchaworamunī, *Phutthatham* ("พุทธธรรม"), p.43.

does not intrinsically produce deluded awareness or necessarily lead to suffering for, "*Arahants* yet have *saññā* but it is a *saññā* that is devoid of *āsava*. That is, it is free from *kilesa*."(T)[40] When *kilesa* are absent perception is called *kusalasaññā* or "wholesome perception", and this is said to lead to the process of *vivaṭṭa* or the opposite of *saṁsāravaṭṭa*, i.e. the process of the ending of suffering. And Rājavaramunī describes *vivaṭṭa* as taking place within the scope of the liberated life here on earth, in opposition to the traditionalist claim that life is equivalent to *saṁsāra* or suffering.

Boyd also presents an interpretation similar to Buddhadāsa's arguing against the traditional view as put forward by Anan. Boyd notes that the Buddha explicitly denied the teaching that *nibbāna* was annihilation. Consequently, if *nibbāna* is the end of *saṁsāra*, and so thus the end of suffering, but it is not physical annihilation then the ending of *saṁsāra* cannot be equivalent to annihilation or death, which is implied in traditional views that define life as inextricably permeated by suffering and the web of *saṁsāra*. Using this argument Boyd then says, in terms very similar to Buddhadāsa, that notions such as rebirth, becoming, aging and dying, as they occur in the *paṭiccasamupāda*,

> can refer as much to the rise and fall of sensations-with-attachment [*saṁsāra*] as they do to physical failure or death.[41]

But while Buddhadāsa's view of the relations between *saṁsāra* and *nibbāna* can be argued to be strictly in accord with Theravāda principles he nevertheless supports it by referring to the Zen view on *saṁsāra*. Following the Zen idiom Buddhadāsa has claimed that *nibbāna* or salvation exists in the condition of *saṁsāra*, or the cycle of rebirth and suffering[42].

Blofeld notes that Zen scholars have criticised the traditionalist Theravādins as being,

> dualistic in that they seek to overcome their *saṁsāric* life in order to attain *nibbāna*; while Zen perceives that *saṁsāra* is none other than *nibbāna*.[43]

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[40] ibid.

[41] James W. Boyd, "The Theravāda View of Saṁsāra", in Somaratna Balasooriya (ed), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, Gordon Fraser, London, 1980, p.32.

[42] The title of one of Buddhadāsa's pamphlets is *In Vaṭṭasaṁsāra There is Nibbān*. See footnote No. 37 above

[43] Blofeld, p.44n.

Rupp notes that this charge of dualism derives from the fact that,

> Whereas for the Theravādins the fundamental motif in the interpretation of the relation between *nirvāṇa* and *saṁsāra* has been that of contrast, the Mahāyānist has typically expressed the conviction that they are ultimately identical.[44]

But despite drawing on Zen notions of the identity of *saṁsāra* and *nibbāna* and using Zen-styled rhetoric Buddhadāsa nevertheless still retains the traditional Theravāda duality of *saṁsāra* and *nibbāna*. He emphasises that both *vaṭṭasaṁsāra* and *nibbāna* exist in this life here on earth but he does not claim, as does Zen, that both are paradoxically simultaneously present, i.e. that *saṁsāra* **is** *nibbāna*. While both *saṁsāra* and *nibbāna* are psychological states for Buddhadāsa they do not both paradoxically exist together. For Buddhadāsa *saṁsāra* or the delusions of "I"-"mine" still exclude *nibbāna*. He does not borrow the Zen notion of the mystical union of opposites. When Buddhadāsa says that *nibbāna* exists in *saṁsāra* he in fact means that what he takes as *nibbāna* exists in what other Theravādins mistakenly believe to be characteristically *saṁsāra* or suffering, i.e. human existence here on earth. This is a further instance of Buddhadāsa's use of Zen-like language to describe and justify Theravāda or re-interpreted Theravāda notions.

Yet while Buddhadāsa does not, like Zen teachers, paradoxically identify *saṁsāra* with *nibbāna* he does maintain that even in *saṁsāra* or the worldly state of compounding and suffering the mind still remains fundamentally pure, or cit-wāng. In contradistinction with the traditional Theravāda view the notion of cit-wāng presents a picture of human beings as fundamentally good and as having in themselves all the qualities required for attaining their own liberation in this life. In the traditional view ordinary humans are fundamentally flawed by their *kilesa* and so are morally inferior to those greater spiritual beings or Theravāda saints who are regarded as having purified their minds of the defilements which still compound the mental states of the average person. By his reforms Buddhadāsa has introduced into Theravāda what Rupp has described as the strength of Mahāyānist teachings,

> its [Mahāyāna Buddhism's] insistence that *nirvāṇa* and *saṁsāra* are ultimately one constitutes an at least potentially positive valuation of the whole of being. Hence the concern of the Mahāyāna Buddhist is with all of reality. All beings participate in the Buddha-nature [One Mind]; all are already ingredient in *nirvāṇa*.[45]

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[44] Rupp, p.57.

[45] ibid. p.63.

That is, Buddhadâsa has imbued Theravâda Buddhism with something of the universal spirit of Mahâyâna while not actually introducing the notions of One Mind, Buddha-nature and other ontological expressions of Mahâyâna teaching. In endowing each person with spiritual perfection, cit-wâng, as their basic character Buddhadâsa also endows each Buddhist individual with the potential authority to govern their own spiritual lives and to strive for the ultimate salvation of *nibbâna*. His effort to abolish the spiritual distinction between monks and laity by opening up *nibbâna* to all thus has a distinctly Mahâyâna character, paralleling the latter's emphasis on the universal potential of all human beings to attain salvation.

At the same time Buddhadâsa retains what Rupp views as the strength of the Theravâda view, which derives from the retention of the distinction between *nibbâna* and *saṁsâra*. Rupp says that in Theravâda Buddhism,

> the religious task entails a straightforward confrontation with moral limitations and a concerted effort to overcome them - an effort, that is, to change the existing state of affairs. The result is a conception of *nirvâṇa* which emphasises differences and consequently the need for changes in the prevailing patterns of phenomenal existence or *saṁsâra*.[46]

In other words, at an ideological level Buddhadâsa's interpretation of Theravâda provides a basis for action in the world, for change and development and for notions of universal rights to the benefits of such actions and changes. Buddhadâsa overcomes some basic ideological limitations of both traditional Mahâyâna and Theravâda teachings, when viewed in the contemporary context. His views counter Mahâyâna Buddhism's undermining of the need for action or change because of the teaching that *nirvâṇa* is already present in every *saṁsâric* or worldly condition, no matter how much it is imbued with suffering. And he also opposes Theravâda Buddhism's elitist view of who is capable and deserving of attaining *nibbâna*.

7.8 Zen and Social Action - The Influence on Buddhadâsa.

The ideas and emphases adopted from Zen are important to Buddhadâsa's system of thought because in the Theravâda and Thai contexts they re-inforce and support the ideological shift effected by the introduction of pivotal notions such as cit-wâng and the interpretative theory of phâsâ-khon - phâsâ-tham. It is significant that the interpretation of Zen which seems to have most influenced Buddhadâsa is contained in a Vietnamese book whose author's explicit intention was to develop a

[46] ibid.

Zen Buddhist foundation for social activism in what was then South Vietnam. The book, *The Miracle of Being Awake - A Manual on Meditation for the Use of Young Activists* by Thich Nhat Hanh, was originally written in Vietnamese for the author's friends in the South Vietnamese Schools of Youth for Social Service. In a description of the time it is said these schools were composed mostly of,

> young Buddhists who have left the more comfortable life in the cities to share the difficulties of the peasants and refugees in the countryside.[47]

The goal of these young Buddhists was to improve the life and situation of the South Vietnamese peasants by following an ideology which was neither communist nor capitalist but Buddhist. For political reasons Thich Nhat Hanh's book was not published in South Vietnam and in fact was first published in translation, both in Thai and English[48], and subsequently became very popular in Thailand. The significance of the book to Buddhadâsa, and his association with its Thai publishers, can be gauged from the following quote from the preface to the 1976 English version, printed in Thailand,

> On the 27th May, Ven. Buddhadâsa Bhikkhu, the most learned monk in Siam, will complete his 70th birthday anniversary. On the same day Mrs Nilchawee Sivaraksa[49] will observe her 40th birthday. As she has a great regard for the Mahâthera, she has ordered a number of copies of "The Miracle of Being Awake", which has been very much admired by the venerable *bhikkhu*, to be especially presented to him.[50]

Buddhadâsa's emphasis on mindfulness as the practice of cit-wâng and on cit-wâng as underlying productive and fruitful work is closely paralleled in "The Miracle of Being Awake". After asking how can a worker practise mindfulness all day and yet do all, "That needs to be done to change and to build an alternative

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[47] **Thich Nhat Hanh**, p.17.

[48] The Thai translator was a monk, Phra Prachâ Pasannathammô (พระ) ประชา ปสนฺนธมฺโม the Thai title being *Pâtihân Haèng Kân-tÿn-yù-samoè - Khû-my Fyk Samâthi Samrap Khon-num-sâw Thî Patibatkân Nai Sangkhom* ("ปาฏิหาริย์แห่งการตื่นอยู่เสมอ – คู่มือฝึกสมาธิสำหรับคนหนุ่มสาวที่ปฏิบัติการในสังคม" *The Miracle of Perpetual Wakefulness - A Handbook for the Practice of Samâdhi for Youth Who are Active in Society.*), Mûlanithi Kômon Khîmthôrng (มูลนิธิโกมลคีมทอง), Bangkok, first printing 2518 (1975).

[49] Nilchawee Sivaraksa is the wife of author and Buddhadâsa supporter, Sulak Sivaraksa.

[50] Introduction to **Thich Nhat Hanh**, p.10.

society?"[51], the author answers himself by saying that,

> There is no reason why mindfulness should be different from focussing all one's attention on one's work, to be alert and to be using one's best judgement.[52]

Buddhadāsa's integration of both *samādhi* and *vipassanā* techniques of meditation and his dual account of cit-wāng as both the original mental state and as the practice to re-attain it can also be seen to be related to the following description of mindfulness as being,

> at the same time a means and an end, at the same time the seed and the fruit. When we practise mindfulness in order to build up concentration, mindfulness is a seed. But mindfulness is the life of awareness ... and therefore mindfulness is also the fruit.[53]

While it is clear that Zen teachings have significantly influenced Buddhadāsa's views his whole system cannot be explained by referring only to this influence. The ideas Buddhadāsa has borrowed from Zen all fit into the pattern of his reformist ideology, and they all buttress his attempts to develop a modernist interpretation of Buddhism in line with the principles outlined in the Chapter Two. There is a convenient parallelism between Zen teachings and the sort of modernist, socially relevant reading of Theravāda Buddhadāsa aims for. However, it is always Theravāda rather than Zen that stands paramount in Buddhadāsa's mind and this is shown most clearly by the fact that when there are discrepancies between Zen and Theravāda, as is inevitably the case, it is always Zen that gives way to Theravāda teachings and not the converse.

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[51] ibid. p.23.

[52] ibid.

[53] ibid. p.24.

CHAPTER 8

BUDDHADASA ON MODERNISATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

Buddhadāsa's importance in Thailand is not limited to his re-interpretation of Buddhist doctrines of salvation or to his having laid the theoretical groundwork for a world-involved or socially-involved Buddhism. For his supporters among modernist Thai Buddhists Buddhadāsa's explicit statements on socio-economic development and on politics, which are developed from the theoretical foundations of his doctrinal re-interpretations, are equally important. It is Buddhadāsa's explicit statements on contemporary social and political issues which have given his work sociological as well as doctrinal and religious significance in Thailand. But while his social philosophy is socially significant it is, nevertheless, flawed by fundamental theoretical contradictions. These contradictions do not result from simple theoretical slips or lapses but rather arise from the very way in which Buddhadāsa has carried out his modernisation and reform of Thai Buddhist doctrine. The contradictions arise from his championing of a world-involved and socially relevant interpretation of Buddhist teachings while still maintaining strict conservatism in the area of clerical practice. That is, there are strong inconsistencies between Buddhadāsa's strict orthopraxy, which as has been shown is a basis of the authorisation of his re-interpretations, and his actual re-interpretations of doctrine. In this chapter Buddhadāsa's views on socio-economic development are presented, and the underlying contradictions in these views are analysed. Chapter Nine follows a similar approach, but instead concentrates on Buddhadāsa's views on political activity and political involvement.

8.1 Buddhadāsa's Qualified Support For Socio-Economic Development.

Buddhadāsa has contributed to the debate on the role of Buddhism in Thailand's socio-economic development by presenting arguments in support of material development, provided such development remains tied to clearly specified religious goals. Buddhadāsa has based his suggestions for a Buddhist approach to national development on general arguments like the following, where he links notions of evolution and progress with his interpretation of the Buddhist world view,

> According to the law of evolution as put forward by contemporary sciences like biology and in particular Darwinism; as expressed by Buddhism in the law of the twenty four kinds of causal relations[1] and the *paṭiccasamuppàda*, and finally as can easily and generally be observed this world gradually advances towards higher and higher levels - if not materially then of necessity mentally. Stagnation and decline are not found ... All this shows that the internal instincts [of living things] together with all the external, surrounding promoting factors only pull things towards increasing betterment, because such is the inherent desire of all living things.(T)[2]

However, when he turns to speak of progress is the social rather than the natural sphere Buddhadāsa maintains that development is no longer inevitable but is dependent upon a conscious integration of both material and spiritual values in human work. Buddhadāsa acknowledges that single-minded material and spiritual activity are respectively capable of effecting progress in their own spheres,

> Whenever we are strongly inclined towards the material side of things we reach the end point of material development, an example being the sudden advances of contemporary science. And whenever the world is collectively inclined towards the mental side of things we will reach the end point of mental development just as in the ancient period of the *arahants*.(T)[3]

However, he maintains that whatever material developments modern science may produce, working on only the material or physical level of activity cannot of itself lead to mental or spiritual development. And Buddhadāsa regards the political conflicts and social tensions of the modern world, arising according to him from moral laxity, as showing that, "Solving problems materially is inadequate, problems must be solved mentally as well."(T)[4]

But Buddhadāsa also claims that a purely mental or spiritual approach to social problems and to the issue of development is equally inadequate, saying that, "In fact it is impossible for us to live by either mind or matter alone.

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[1]In the *Paṭṭhāna* of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* causality or the conditional dependence of all phenomena is analysed into twenty four different types of conditionality or *paccaya*.

[2]**Phutthathāt**, *Nipphān* ("นิพพาน"), p.19.

[3]ibid. p.20.

[4] id., *Hāk Khōrmūnit Khau Mā Phutthasāsanā Kor Yang Yū Dai* ("หากคอมมูนิสต์เข้ามาพุทธศาสนาก็ยังอยู่ได้" *If Communism Comes Buddhism Can Still Survive*), Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา), Samutprakan Thailand, 2517 (1974), p.101.

Development has both."(T)[5] Nevertheless, he still regards spiritual factors as having the greatest importance and as being the main determinants of attaining successful or problem-free development,

> It must be the correct and important things that lead. For example, the mental, the intellectual, the spiritual should lead the material.(T)[6]

By way of example of what he regards as a correct approach to development Buddhadāsa offers Japan, home of Zen, as evidence for the power of social activity informed by the spiritual condition of "freed-mind" or cit-wâng to provide a basis for all round welfare,

> Japan took the path of mental instead of material development and now Japan's material development has progressed to the point that the foreigners [i.e. Europeans and Americans] are afraid of the birthplace of that mental development. Japan has a high level of mental development ... it is in everyday life, in the very culture, that is, the kind of Buddhism we call Zen.(T)[7]

Significantly Buddhadāsa regards Zen-influenced mental development as promoting qualities such as resoluteness, industriousness, vigour in work, forbearance as well as politeness and gentleness - which together could be considered a manager's checklist of the attributes of an efficient worker. In other words, Buddhadāsa would like to see a Zen-styled mental culture develop in Thailand in order to promote the kind of qualities which might lead to Thai workers becoming more efficient agents of material development. This reveals another side to Buddhadāsa's interest in ending the distinction between the layperson's and the monk's religious paths. He regards the qualities acquired by laypersons through meditation and strict spiritual practice as not only permitting them to reach *nibbàna* but as also enabling them to work more efficiently at the material level. For Buddhadāsa working with cit-wâng or a "freed-mind" not only frees one from suffering but also helps to achieve better material results. This allows him to say, "Developing the mind according to *dhamma* or by following the correct worldly way

[5] id., *Baramatham* ("บรมธรรมฯ, p.74.

[6] id., *Thamma Kap Lok Ca Pai Dūaykan Dai Rȳ Mai?* ("ธรรมะกับโลกจะไปดวยกันไดหรือไม" *Can Dhamma and the World Get Along Together?*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2521 (1978), p.12.

[7] id., *Baramatham*, ("บรมธรรม"), pp.84-85.

amount to the same thing."(T)[8] That is, provided people act morally Buddhadāsa does not distinguish between either material or mental development, seeing both as necessarily following from abiding by *dhamma* and developing cit-wāng.

Because of the importance placed on spiritual practice in his view of development Buddhadāsa is a strong critic of the present dominant approach to development in Thailand, which he regards as being too one-sidedly materialist,

> We have been born in a primitive, underdeveloped country, although that is in fact only true of the minority. But we follow the backsides of countries which are developed or run after materialism. We take people who are mad over matter as our teachers. Even if were born in a forest we should be able to become *paccekabuddhas*, but we don't want to. We still run after the tail end of the progress of those who are materially developed. Why do we worship the material side of development? ... It is more, more, more, because we don't know ... that it is dangerous to humanity.(T)[9]

By materialism Buddhadāsa means the psychological or spiritual domination of the mind by desires for material objects and physical pleasures. Buddhism teaches detachment from the objects of the material world and defines *nibbāna* as a condition which is unaffected by suffering because it is totally independent of the impermanent things of the world. Thus when he criticises development in Thailand as being overly materialist Buddhadāsa means that it is being gone about with a mental attitude of attachment and in such a way that it promotes further attachment to material things, which in turn leads to suffering among those who participate in such development. According to Buddhadāsa confusion and social disorder result from undertaking development with an immoral attitude of craving or attachment to material results,

> The world now aims only for material development because of cowardice and the fear of not keeping up with "Them", of not having the equipment to fight "Them" or to live well ... Consequently the whole world is in this state of disorganisation and confusion. There are complicated problems without end which have arisen in particular from moral degeneration.(T)[10]

Moral degeneration here means attachment and the self-centredness of "I"-"mine", which Buddhadāsa regards as the root causes of the confusion and lack of peace in the world.

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[8] ibid. p.82.

[9] id., *Thamma Kap Lōk Ca Pai Dūaykan Dai Rȳ Mai?* ("ธรรมะกับโลกจะไปด้วยกันได้หรือไม่"), p.9.

[10] id., *Baramatham* ("บรมธรรม"), pp.75-76.

The notion of peace or *santi* is central to Buddhist doctrine because the spiritual goal of *nibbāna* is conceived of as being the stilling and extinction of confused attachment and its concomitant suffering. As Chinda Chandrkaew observes,

> peace is the intrinsic value about which all others move. Hence it is stated that there is no bliss higher than peace (*Dhammapāda* verse 202), which itself here means the attainment of *nibbāna*.[11]

Buddhadāsa maintains that, "Nature wants there to be peace. If there isn't peace there will be destruction and ruin.(T)[12] The nature spoken of here is the cosmic-moral order of *dhamma*, and the destruction and ruin is consequent upon the factionalism and conflict which arise from self-centred attachment and greed. "Keeping the peace" is a strong value in Thai culture where it is most commonly expressed as an aversion to wun-wāy (วุ่นวาย), or confusion and disorder which are believed to lead to instability and possibly even anarchy. Morell and Samudavanija comment that,

> The proper [Thai] behavioural mode is to be quiet, calm and submissive. In contrast wun-wāy and its confusion upset peace and order in society, the most un-Thai action of all.[13]

Buddhadāsa thus approves of the material benefits of socio-economic development but not the cultural and social costs of the associated loss of spiritual values.

8.2 Buddhadāsa's Integrated Theory of Action.

It was noted in Chapter Two that many of Buddhadāsa's supporters among progressive, educated Thai Buddhists seek in Buddhism an independent and indigenous ideology of development; a set of intrinsically Thai rather than foreign guidelines for the overall progress of the country. Because Buddhadāsa and his lay audience desire Buddhist doctrine to be a theoretically consistent unity, if Buddhism is to fulfil an ideological role supportive of socio-economic development then the religion's teachings must be interpreted in such a way that material activity in the social world is integrated with and seen to develop from the fundamental principles of doctrine. Because progressive Buddhists repudiate the traditional lay forms of Buddhism as superstitiously concerned with merit and rebirth it is not sufficient

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[11]Chandrkaew, p.33.

[12]Phutthathāt, *Cut-Māy Khōrng Kānsyksā* ("จุดหมายของการศึกษา"), p.13.

[13]Morell & Samudavanija, p.30.

that contemporary notions of modernisation or development be interpreted simply in terms of the historically-given lay aspect of the religion. Rather, material social activity must be integrated with the doctrinal core of the religion, i.e. with the attainment of ultimate peace or *nibbāna*. While not posing this problem explicitly Buddhadāsa nevertheless provides the foundation of an integrated Buddhist interpretation of action. For example, he implies that socio-economic development and social justice are essential for spiritual attainment and thus for salvation. In the context of discussing the injustices in the contemporary capitalist approach to socio-economic development in Thailand Buddhadāsa says, "If the political system in the world is not good [in promoting justice and development, the people of] this world will not have the hope of attaining *paramadhamma* [ultimate *nibbāna*]."(T)[14] He equates the social injustices of capitalism with immorality and materialism,

> If in any country there are still people ... in need it must mean that there is not equality in that society. As a consequence disorganisation of many kinds and varieties will necessarily arise; as, for example, conflicts in the country, the breaking up of social harmony, insurrection, changes in the order of government, changes in the economic system to socialism or communism. Because when the poor can bear their situation no more they tend to look for a way to destroy the extremely selfish wealthy people with no regard for anything at all. And many other kinds of disruption then follow, such as making war and killing each other.(T)[15]

Thus Buddhadāsa thinks that in unjust societies where the rich selfishly hoard social wealth the poor have no opportunity for spiritual attainment because of the unbearable nature of their worldly existence. And the disorder and confusion which result from the poor rebelling against social injustice and inequality only makes the spiritual peace of *nibbāna* an even more remote and unattainable goal. Morally guided social activity for overcoming what Buddhadāsa regards as the related problems of poverty and social injustice is consequently a pre-requisite for making spiritual attainment or *nibbāna* a universally accessible goal.

Buddhadāsa's emphasis on work, which he takes as meaning, "That which human beings must do, both physically and spiritually, for both physical and spiritual results,"(T)[16] provides a further basis in his doctrinal re-interpretations for an integrated theory of action. He implies that work is essential to spiritual attainment in such statements as, that in regard to learning about the path to

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[14]**Phutthathāt**, *Baramatham* "บรมธรรม", p.102.

[15]id., *Hāk Khōrmūnit Khau Mā Phutthasāsanā Kor Yang Yū Dai* ("หากคอมมูนิสต์เข้ามาพุทธศาสนาก็ยังอยู่ได้"), pp.29-30.

[16]id., *Baramatham* ("บรมธรรม"), p.98.

nibbāna, "work itself is the best teacher."(T)[17]

However, there are theoretical difficulties in integrating the doctrine of transcendent salvation with any notion of material activity and in making both spiritual and worldly activity part of the same fundamental effort for salvation. Wit summarises the difficulty when he says that the core of Theravâda doctrine has traditionally involved,

> a belief in the virtue of non-involvement in the struggles of society. Man's physical labour or the application of human intelligence to the solution of worldly problems is not eulogised or even considered [by the religious] to be the means to a better life ... Neither individual nor collective economic, social or political action is suggested as the appropriate means or improving man's lot.[18]

8.3 *Nibbāna* As Both a Social and a Religious Goal.

Buddhadāsa deals with this difficulty by no longer conceiving of *nibbāna* solely as an indvidual spiritual goal but also as a social goal whose realisation necessitates social action as well as personal spiritual practice. In contradistinction with the traditional Theravāda view that *nibbāna* is only accessible to world-renouncing monks Buddhadāsa considers Buddhist salvation to be open to all, lay and monk. At the level of individual salvation Buddhadāsa retains the traditional teaching that *nibbāna*, as a condition which is independent of all changing things, is attainable no matter what one's material circumstances. However, at the social level he maintains that a supportive social order is a necessary pre-requisite for every person to in fact have the opportunity to work for and attain *nibbāna*.

Buddhadāsa denies the traditional view of spiritual practice in which aiming to attain *nibbāna* necessitates retreating from social involvement to the monastery or forest hermitage. When, as in the traditional Buddhist view on salvation, the quest for *nibbāna* is limited to a small elite equating the attainment of salvation with detachment from social involvement does not pose any great difficulty. But when *nibbāna* is regarded as a universally accessible ideal it is clearly impossible to equate the quest for salvation with retreatism. It is impossible for every member of society to avoid or retreat from mundane distractions without social order collapsing, and so for Buddhadāsa *nibbāna* must be defined as a goal attainable within the social sphere. And given that the ability of a layperson to work for *nibbāna* is dependent upon a supportive social order, such as having sufficient wealth and free time to be

[17] ibid. p.99.

[18] Wit, p.57.

able to practice meditation or study Buddhist teachings, salvation in Buddhadâsa's system consequently becomes conditional upon the state of the social world. For when retreating from social involvement is no longer an acceptable path to *nibbâna*, and when injustice and inequality inhibit some people's ability to work for that spiritual goal then removing those inhibiting social factors is essential if *nibbâna* is in fact to be a universally relevant and accessible goal.

While the realisation of *nibbâna* as a universally accessible social goal is dependent upon a relatively prosperous and just social order Buddhadâsa does not repudiate the traditional teaching that any given **individual** can always strive for and attain *nibbâna* whatever his or her social circumstances. An individual whose circumstances inhibit his or her ability to undertake spiritual practices and strive for *nibbâna* always has the option of renouncing social involvement and becoming a monk or recluse. Buddhadâsa consequently does not contradict the teaching that *nibbâna*, as a condition of personal salvation, is independent of all changing phenomena. It is only as a social ideal rather than as a personal ideal that the attainment of *nibbâna* is dependent upon the realisation of a supportive social order. Similarly, it is only as a social ideal that the attainment of *nibbâna* necessarily implies action in the world to better society; the personal attainment of *nibbâna*, as in traditional Buddhism, necessitates no social involvement whatsoever, and in Buddhadâsa's system remains a condition attainable totally outside of society. That is the path to *nibbâna*, as an individual state of salvation, remains, in theory, essentially independent of one's material circumstances. But *nibbâna*, as the universally relevant social goal Buddhadâsa defines it as, cannot be realised without a certain just and equitable social order.

Buddhadâsa's emphasis on the relation between social order and justice and the opportunity for spiritual attainment has a well-established precedent in the Theravâda notion of the *cakkavattin* or righteous monarch. The traditional Thai view of the *cakkavattin* is presented in the *Traibhūmikathā* and Andaya notes that in that text,

> The legendary Buddhist king, Dharmâs'okarâja, is cited as the ideal example of a *cakravartin* who practised meritorious works and eased the lot of his people so that they could devote more time to spiritual matters.[19]

That is, there is a traditional recognition in the Buddhist tradition of the importance of social order to the general populace's spiritual welfare, and on this point Tambiah makes the relevant observation that,

[19] Barbara Watson Andaya, "Statecraft in the Reign of Lu Thai of Sukhodaya", in Bardwell L. Smith (ed), *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*, Anima Books, Chambersburg Penn., 1978, p.4.

> From early times Buddhism has been positively related to a conception of an ideal politico-social order, whose cornerstone was a righteous monarch who would promote a prosperous society and religion. This Buddhist conception of a moral polity readily fits with a formulation that only a materially prosperous society can be ready for the pursuit of spiritual concerns; it also fits equally with a political ideology of benevolent absolutism combined with welfare socialism.[20]

However, while the welfare of the populace has traditionally been regarded in terms of their following the lay or *lokiya* path, Buddhadāsa integrates the social welfare tradition of Buddhist political teachings with the formerly monastic ideal of attaining *nibbāna*. According to Buddhadāsa a social order should not only promote the moral welfare of the populace, the traditionally defined responsibility of a *cakkavattin*, it should also meet the much more exacting criterion of contributing to the actual spiritual salvation of the populace.

8.4 Social Ills and the Failure of Contemporary Religion.

For Buddhadāsa the fundamental cause of social problems, and of the disorder and confusion which hinders the realisation of *nibbāna* as a social goal, is inadequate or improper morality, "All disorganisation [wun-wāy] is the result of a lack of morality."(T)[21] Moral failures, that is, not maintaining cit-wāng or detached mindfulness leads to the self-centredness of "I"-"mine" which Buddhadāsa regards as the immediate cause of social problems, "Self-centredness is the basic cause of suffering, both individually and socially."(T)[22] Without the mindfulness and self-restraint involved in moral practice the truths of *anattā* and *anicca* are lost sight of. Misguidedly thinking that there is a self which can possess and things that can be possessed, people selfishly crave material objects, and this selfish craving causes social suffering when some consequently hoard wealth while others go in need. When there is hoarding by the "haves" there are attempts by the "have nots" to take the stored wealth, and so social conflict and confusion arises. Thus for Buddhadāsa the causes of turmoil or the lack of social peace are traced to the same moral lapses and self-centredness which produce personal suffering and lack of mental peace.

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[20] **Tambiah**, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, p.431.

[21] **Phutthathāt**, *Thammik Sangkhomniyom Bǣp Phadetkān Rỹ Sangkhomniyom Tām Lak Hǣng Sāsanā , Thuk Sāsanā* ("ธัมมิกสังคมนิยมแบบเผด็จการ หรือ สังคมนิยมตามหลักแหงศาสนาทุกศาสนา" *A Dictatorial Style of Dhammic Socialism, or Socialism in Accord with the Principles of Every Religion*), Samnak-nangsỹ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2517 (1974), p.3.

[22] id., *Kharāwāt Tham* ("ฆราวาสธรรม"), p.43.

Buddhadāsa further traces the moral failings which cause social problems to the failure of religions to effectively communicate their spiritual message,

> Because of wrong interpretations people fail to apply themselves to religious practice so that their so-called "religion" ceases to be an effective device for solving the problems of everyday existence. Only when a religion has failed to do its duty does materialism come into existence in the world ... if religious institutions interpret the tenets held by them correctly, especially the tenets expressed in the language of *dhamma* [i.e. phāsā-tham], then religious practice itself will prove to be the "decided opponent" of materialism in all its forms. [23]

Buddhadāsa regards his phāsā-tham interpretations of Buddhism as not only revealing the correct way to personal salvation but also as correcting doctrinal misinterpretations which have led to people becoming disenchanted with religion. He attempts to re-interest his Thai audience in what he sees as the universally relevant truths of Buddhism, and implores Thais to take a fresh look at their religion, as interpreted in phāsā-tham,

> Don't get the impression that morality is reactionary. Children, adults and people with political and economic power tend to look on religions or morality as reactionary and as following the ways of our grandparents ... The truth is that it [religion] has reached the point of being reactionary because it has been going in the wrong direction for so long.(T)[24]

According to Buddhadāsa not only has the history of doctrinal misinterpretation made world-involved people disenchanted with religion, it has also led to devout people abandoning important areas of social activity. The historical division between the mundane and the supramundane has led many to regard active world-involvement directed towards ameliorating social problems as antithetical to their religious life, and Buddhadāsa decries Buddhists' avoidance of political involvement and the abandonment of political activity to the self-centred and self-seeking,

> In society people who have sharp and pure spiritual intelligence usually prefer to avoid getting involved in politics, accordingly aiming only for the pure, in depth study of the humanities, literature, ancient history or the natural sciences. In Thailand there are people who don't dare utter a word about politics; who don't dare speak about the problems of morality, who are afraid of being accused that they are involved in politics. Consequently they don't dare mention the word "peace" or consider the thing called peace. They detest and are afraid of the word "politics". They are afraid because they think that politics is something dirty and deceitful ... When

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[23] **Buddhadāsa**, *Christianity and Buddhism*, p.16.

[24] **Phutthathāt**, *Cut-māy Khōrng Kān-syksā* ("จุดหมายของการศึกษา"), p.9.

> it happens that intelligent people like this prefer not to get involved in politics, it consequently seems that it will be left only to the stupid or to people with worldly [materialist] mentality to get involved in political affairs. The people with true and pure intelligence have deserted it. This is called the degeneration of the world because of the failure to use intelligence for the purposes of peace.(T)[25]

In a similar vein Buddhadāsa has also said,

> Here even among us Buddhists some may doubt, "Why should we play a leading role in all the affairs of the people in the whole world? Let us only be interested in our own internal Buddhist affairs ..." If there is anyone who thinks like this please let him recollect the words of the Buddha who says: "The Tathāgata is born in the world for the happiness of all beings" ... Moreover, when the Buddha first sent groups of monks out to spread the teaching, He emphasised this as well saying, "Go you forth, Oh *bhikkhus* ... to preach the divine life for the benefit and happiness of the world ..." It is proper for us to sacrifice ourselves to play a leading role in the affairs of the whole world as the Buddha intended us to do.[26]

In response to the traditionalist claim that spirituality or *dhamma* is the antithesis of involvement in the social world Buddhadāsa replies,

> In one sense *dhamma* is indeed the opposite of the world, but it is opposite in that it helps get rid of problems. When the world is pointed towards evil *dhamma* will point it towards good ... Whenever there is peace and happiness it can be said that *dhamma* and this world have have been able to show their amicable relations.(T)[27]

For Buddhadāsa the association of *dhamma* or morality with politics, that is, the participation of Buddhists in the political process, would prevent politics becoming corrupt and a source of conflict. This is his justification for saying, "I am of the opinion that *dhamma* is a political ideology."(T)[28] Buddhadāsa thus views social problems as resulting from an inadequate level of moral understanding and moral practice in the lay society, a failing whose cause lies in the inadequacies of the Buddhist church. He regards Buddhism as having failed because of its promotion of erroneous interpretations of doctrine which fail to show the relevance of religion

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[25]ibid. pp.8-9.

[26]Buddhadāsa, "Exchanging Dhamma While Fighting", in *Visakha Puja*, Buddhist Association of Thailand, Bangkok, 2513 (1970), p.33.

[27] Phutthathāt, *Thamma Kap Lōk Ca Pai Dūaykan Dai Rȳ Mai?* ("ธรรมะกับโลกจะไปดวยกันไดหรือไม"), pp.5-6.

[28] id., *Thamma Nai Thāna Latthi Kān-mȳang* ("ธรรมะในฐานะลัทธิการเมือง" *Dhamma As a Political Ideology*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2521 (1978), p.2.

to modern life and so turn people away from the religion and render those who do stay with the official church socially and politically impotent.

Buddhadāsa's views on the need for moral people to become politically involved not only counter the traditional Buddhist view that spiritual attainment is opposed to worldly involvement but also go against the traditional Thai view of political activity. As Morell and Samudavanija note, "The image of politics in Thailand is of an activity that is dirty, immoral, manipulative, corrupt and chaotic."[29] A corollary of this traditional view is the belief that political involvement is spiritually corrupting and Somboon Suksamran observes that while there is in fact a fundamental structural relation between institutional Buddhism and the Thai political establishment (see Chapter Two) the view that only a "pure" or politically disinterested *saṅgha* can ensure the moral welfare of the nation leads both the Thai rulers and the *saṅgha* authorities to, "maintain that the *saṅgha* is divorced from mundane affairs."[30] Buddhadāsa thus goes against tradition by bringing the political import and significance of Buddhism into the open, and this is one of the main attractions of his system of thought to progressive Thai Buddhists. As one commentator and supporter states,

> He [Buddhadāsa] has yet done things different from the customary activities of usual religionists and moralists, especially in Thailand. That is, he has criticised contemporary society and politics.(T)[31]

8.5 Education and the Solution of Social Problems.

Given that Buddhadāsa isolates the roots of social problems and conflicts as lying in inadequate and improper moral knowledge, education has a pivotal role in his blueprint for solving social ills, "Education ... is the thing we take to be of the most importance. It is the foundation of everything."(T)[32]

Buddhadāsa's emphasis on the importance of education in his view of a better Thai society has strong historical precedents. Historically it was the monks who were the educators in Thailand and the temples were the only schools, a situation

[29]**Morell & Samudavanija**, p.25.

[30]**Suksamran**, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, p.1.

[31]**Khanakammakān , Sāsanā Phya Kān-phatanā**, *Phutthathāt Kap Khon Run-mai* ("พุทธทาสกับคนรุ่นใหม่"), Mūlanithi Kōmon Khīmthōrng (มูลนิธิโกมลคีมทอง), Bangkok, 2526, pp.12-13.

[32]**Phutthathāt**, *Baramatham* ("**ปรมธรรม**"), p.45.

which has only changed significantly since World War II when the state education system has been able to take over the role of the old temple school. But until quite recently the state school system and the temple schools were often one and the same. In 1898 when King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) sought to establish government sponsored primary education in the Thai provinces he did it through the temples, by using the monks as teachers, because the then Siam lacked both the teachers and the finances to build an education system from scratch. Reynolds observes that this decision,

> took advantage of the traditional practice of schooling young boys in the monasteries, and it kept secular and religious learning bound together as they had always been. In Vajirañāṇa's words [the then Supreme Patriarch], "Secular and religious learning flow in the same channel. Each will sustain the burdens of the other so that both may move forward and progress."[33]

However, Buddhadāsa regards the increasing secularisation of education in Thailand as a negative development and would like to return to the old historical norm where religious and worldly education were integrated.

He criticises the trend towards purely vocational education calling it education for mere survival, rather than for spiritual development. In particular Buddhadāsa condemns the Thai educators and educational administrators who base education in Thailand on what he considers to be the materialist, career-centred systems common in Western countries, instead of following spiritual principles,

> Because they [Thai educators] believe the foreigners more than the Lord Buddha, more than Jesus Christ, more than the Prophet Mohammed, they consequently arrange the educational system to follow the foreigners.(T)[34]

Buddhadāsa contends that concern for the details of material survival has become so great that it has been forgotten that without a religious code of ethics such things are devoid of meaning. To counter this trend he says that the central purpose of education should be to teach children spiritual fundamentals. And the result of the sort of education Buddhadāsa proposes would be people reaping the spiritual and material benefits of living according to cit-wāng.

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[33] Craig J. **Reynolds** (trans.), *Autobiography: The Life of Prince-Patriarch Vajirañāṇa of Siam 1860-1921*, Ohio University Press, Athens Ohio, 1979, p.xxxvii.

[34] **Phutthathāt**, *Baramtham* ("บรมธรรม"), p.4.

8.6 Contradictions in Buddhadāsa's Social Thought.

While it is Buddhadāsa's social and political thought which has been a major determinant of his popularity among modernist Thai Buddhists ironically it is this aspect of his work which is the most flawed and contradictory. For example, Buddhadāsa has not acknowledged or considered the serious implications of his doctrinal re-interpretations for the Thai *saṅgha*. If, as Buddhadāsa teaches, spiritual and social activity are integrated and if the layperson thereby has access to the traditionally clerical aspects of Buddhism it is not clear what role is left for the monks or the *saṅgha* in his proposed system of Buddhist-based socio-economic development. Furthermore, despite all his calls for the active involvement of Buddhists in socially oriented activities the contradiction remains that Buddhadāsa himself is not concretely involved in social welfare activities, and in fact he explicitly denies that this is the proper role of the monk,

> Monks should not directly co-operate in social welfare activities or in any of the people's developmental works ... They should be a group that provides the people with mental and spiritual development, progress and safety.(T)[35]

In the opening chapters it was noted that in accord with the significance placed upon orthopraxy in Theravāda Buddhism Buddhadāsa's innovative doctrinal reforms were founded on and authorised by his strict adherence to traditional clerical practices. However, the doctrinal reforms Buddhadāsa authorises by his practical conservatism imply a radical restructuring of the traditional roles of the Buddhist monk and layperson. That is, his re-interpretations of Buddhist teaching imply a radical reform in the very practices whose traditional forms he clings to and continues to support. However, Buddhadāsa does not acknowledge that he himself undermines the traditional historically accepted bases for maintaining the strict monk-lay role division in Theravāda Buddhism and neither does he acknowledge that there is a fundamental contradiction between his conservative practice and his radical re-interpretations of doctrine which imply an utter reformation of Buddhist practice.

This contradiction between, on the one hand, maintaining a traditional role division between monks and laity, and on the other hand, supporting modernist, world-involved interpretations of doctrine in which that role division has no place is an inconsistency that is not restricted only to Buddhadāsa's writings. It is a

[35] From an interview with Buddhadāsa reproduced in Sulak Siwarak, *Khanchǒrng Sǒrng Phra* ("คันฉองสองพระ" *Reflections of the Monkhood*), Samnak-phim Lāy-sȳ Thai, Bangkok, 2522 (1979), p.255.

characteristic of the work of many other modernist Buddhists. For example, there is a growing trend in Thailand, with advocates across the political and social spectrum, to promote the training of monks as community development workers. Phra Rājavaramunī has offered the following rationale for giving monks secular as well as religious training and for expanding their traditional role to include secular activities,

> It is not that we are trying to secularise the Buddhist monk. Rather we are attempting to restore his traditional place as religious leader and guide of the people ... Besides their own peculiar duties towards the goal of self-enlightenment, monks are bound with many social obligations to serve their community and to render reasonable services for the benefit of the layman's society.[36]

However, such clerical involvement in society in fact jeopardises the traditional symbolic value of the *saṅgha*, eroding the religious and spiritual standing of the monk by his performance of acts perceived as essentially secular. When it is argued that the layperson should have complete access to the traditional *lokuttara* or clerical aspect of the religion, and conversely that the monk should become involved in traditionally secular development and welfare projects, then the monk can no longer claim any special religious status or respect. The monk's hands are tainted by worldly involvement just as the layperson's role is sacralised. Despite the groundswell of support for clerical involvement in society as a means of refinding and rejustifying the monkly role, the notion is nevertheless regarded with considerable ambivalence by many senior members of the *saṅgha*. As Morgan opines,

> It is not the particular standard of living [of the Thai people] that is in question, but the style, rate and effects of continual changes in standards. The restless generation of wants and desires has such great affinities to the burning thirst or insatiable craving which lies at the very core of Buddhist concern, that the *saṅgha* leadership could scarcely escape ambivalence about the whole process of economic development and growth, the process of modernisation.[37]

I agree with Morgan's contention that those who support,

> the expansion of the activities of the monks and the enhancement of the aspirations of the laity, do not seem to perceive these notions as blurring

[36]Cited in Donald K. Swearer, "Some Observations on New Directions in Thai Buddhism", in *Visakha Puja*, Buddhist Association of Thailand, Bangkok, 2513 (1970), p.56.

[37]Bruce F. Morgan, "Vocation of Monk and Layman: Signs of Change in Thai Buddhist Ethics", in Bardwell L. Smith (ed), *Contributions to Asian Studies, Vol.4, Tradition and Change in Theravāda Buddhism: Essays on Ceylon and Thailand in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, E.J. Brill, Leiden The Netherlands, 1973, p.72.

the distinction between monk and laity.[38]

Even though he verbally supports socio-economic development and an expansion of the layperson's role into the traditionally clerical domain Buddhadâsa is not in practice prepared to correspondingly deconstruct the barriers which separate the monk from the social world. Despite the contradiction that it creates in his arguments for active Buddhist involvement in society Buddhadâsa is perhaps unwilling to deal with the implications of being seen as explicitly blurring the traditional demarcation between lay and monkly roles, a development which Morgan argues is almost universally regarded as,

> a threat to the internal stability of the *saṅgha*, to the prestige of the *saṅgha* in Thai society and to the health of Thai society so dependent upon the functioning of the *saṅgha*.[39]

Given these difficulties it would seem that if Buddhadâsa's re-interpreted system of Buddhism is to be saved his notion of Buddhist social action must be interpreted as a modernist, world-involved ideology which is applicable only to the layperson and not to the monk. Buddhist teachings have never placed negative sanctions on lay involvement in the social world, and Buddhadâsa confers on the laity all the spiritual rights to salvation that were traditionally reserved for the clergy. However, he denies monks the right to participate in the worldly activities which he otherwise defines as central to his modernist notion of Buddhism. In insisting that monks refrain from becoming involved in secular or development activities Buddhadâsa simultaneously denies the *saṅgha* a place in his integrated view of Buddhist spiritual and social action. Indeed, Buddhadâsa's own role as a monk is undermined by this contradiction between his radical theory and conservative practice. But while the contradiction is glaring it is not acknowledged by Buddhadâsa, let alone resolved.

8.7 Theoretical Difficulties With Theravâda Ethics.

In addition to the contradiction between Buddhadâsa's theories and his conservative practice there is, however, a further theoretical difficulty associated with his attempt to integrate the mundane and supramundane aspects of Buddhist teachings. This difficulty lies in the very character of Theravâda ethical doctrines. As discussed above, for *nibbāna* to be a universally accessible social goal would

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[38] ibid. p.70.

[39] ibid.

require co-operative effort to create a just and prosperous society. That is, co-operating and working with other people are central to the attainment of the social goal of *nibbāna* and of the social conditions under which all can work for *nibbāna*. But such co-operative activity is not at all esssential for individual effort aimed at attaining *nibbāna*, which on the contrary has traditionally been defined as the activity of the social recluse and renunciate. Theravāda ethical teachings have likewise traditionally extolled the virtues of self-restraint and mental control which are essential for calming and focussing the mind and for facilitating the development of meditative insight. Theravāda ethical writings on the *lokuttara* or supramundane path concentrate exclusively on the virtues of individual spiritual practice rather than on collective or co-operative activity. Traditional Theravāda ethical notions are defined more in terms of attitudes than actions, emphasising the individual's state of mind towards others more than any concrete expression of assistance to others. Consequently, it is not clear what scriptural sources Buddhadāsa can refer to in justifying his notion of Buddhist social involvement. For example, the important Buddhist ethical goals of *mettā*, lovingkindness, and *karunā*, compassion, are defined in the *Visuddhimagga* as follows,

> Lovingkindness is characterised here as promoting the aspect of welfare. Its function is to prefer welfare. It is manifested as the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing loveableness in beings. It succeeds when it makes ill-will subside, and fails when it produces [selfish] affection.[40]

> Compassion is characterised as promoting the aspect of allaying suffering. Its function resides in not bearing others' suffering. It is manifested as non-cruelty. Its proximate cause is to see helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. It succeeds when it makes cruelty subside and it fails when it produces sorrow.[41]

Compassion and loving-kindness are thus manifested by the removal of one's own cruelty and of one's own annoyance of others, not by any positive contribution of assistance. And compassion is explicitly defined as not meaning to bear others' suffering. The utterly individual rather than co-operative character of Theravāda ethics is shown by the fact that even the above attitudinal virtues must be given up at certain stages of spiritual practice in order for the mind to be totally concentrated on attaining salvation. Acharn Mun's biographer gives the following account,

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[40] Visuddhimagga, IX, 93.

[41] ibid., IX, 94.

> The mind that is still worrying about other things or other people is like a ship overloaded with cargo and soon doomed to a watery grave. For such a mind no hope for the cessation of suffering can be expected. Whatever lovingkindness there is towards others must cease for the time being. When the Final Goal is being attained, lovingkindness for others must die away, for it will interfere with the attainment of the goal itself.[42]

The Buddhist notion of welfare, from the spiritual perspective of the follower of the *dhamma*, does not necessarily incorporate actually aiding other people in a material or concrete sense by changing the condition of the world. Rather Buddhist ethics emphasise making people feel happy by helping them adjust their desires to the world. As Wit observes,

> Certain individual acts of charity and benevolence are suggested, but there is no philosophical or religious justification for human struggle to change the world.[43]

It is the above notion of spiritual welfare which underlies the following passage from the *Loka Sutta*, which describes three types of people who "help the world": an enlightened *tathàgata*, an *arahant* follower of a *tathàgata*, and a *tathàgata*'s follower who aspires for *arahantship*,

> Behold O *bhikkhus* these three types of people who, when they are born into the world, are necessarily born for helping many people, for the happiness of many people, for the welfare, for the benefit, for aiding, for the happiness of *devatà* and of human beings.(T)[44]

All of the terms, "helping", "welfare", "benefit", and "aiding" above denote spiritual and not material welfare.

Rahula notes that in ancient Ceylon, source of many of the traditions of Theravāda Buddhism, opinion was divided as to whether monks should engage themselves in humanitarian activities. He says,

> There were two classes of monks. One class of monks devoted themselves only to meditation, with the sole purpose of saving themselves, without taking any interest in the welfare of the people. The other class of monks seems to have taken an interest in the welfare of the people - both spiritual and material - in addition to their own salvation.[45]

However, Rahula observes that the consensus which gradually arose among the monks, and which remains the general opinion in Thailand today, was that monks,

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[42](Venerable Phra Acharn Maha) **Boowa** Nyanasampanno, p.110.

[43]**Wit**, pp.57-58.

[44]*Loka Sutta*, *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Vol.25/verse263/p.266.

[45]**Rahula**, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p.193.

> could serve the people best by leading a holy life themselves. Their way of life was an inspiration and example for the people to follow a righteous life.[46]

Siddhi Butr-Indr agrees that this moral-exemplary role is the view of correct monkly practice current in Thailand, saying,

> The fundamental duty of the monk towards the lay adherent is to conduct himself as the model, teacher, instructor, guide and promoter of morality and other spiritual values in society.[47]

As discussed above Buddhadâsa concurs with this traditional isolation of the monk from active social involvement. But leaving aside the practical difficulties Buddhadâsa's position creates for the *saṅgha* it is still the case that if his system is to be saved, and to function as a lay rather than clerical Buddhist ideology of socio-economic development, it is necessary to provide for the layperson a clear link between the personal spiritual practice required for salvation and co-operative moral activity in the social world aimed. But given that, on the one hand, Buddhadâsa rejects popular lay forms of Buddhism which have been the traditional source of co-operative ethical notions in Buddhism, and, on the other hand, that *lokuttara* ethics provide no clear basis for co-operative social welfare activity it is not clear how personal practice and social involvement can in fact be integrated in Buddhadâsa's system.

Because of the individualistic character of efforts at attaining salvation in traditional Theravâda doctrine social relations are not a necessary or integral part of the path to *nibbāna*, but like all interactions with the world are something to be treated warily if they cannot be avoided. But once Buddhadâsa universalises the religious goal and makes it the acme of both the clerical and the lay paths as well as the ideal and goal of social activity, then the precise relation between social interaction and involvement with others and the personal attainment of *nibbāna* must be made explicit. Buddhadâsa himself emphasises that,

> As for the matter of *nibbāna*, which is the chief or head of peace, we should arrange for it to be something manifest in the pages of general publications as a matter of everyday study for each person. This is because the mater of *nibbāna* denotes salvation, which follows the wants and inclinations of the instincts of every sentient being.(T)[48]

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[46]ibid. p.194.

[47]Butr-Indr, p.118.

[48]Phutthathāt, *Nipphān* ("นิพพาน"), p.80.

In traditional Buddhist societies social relations were not viewed as crucial to personal salvation but as the obligation of laypeople to abide by the king's laws, to pay the king's taxes and to serve in his army in exchange for the monarch's maintenance of both the social and spiritual orders. Being solely of the supramundane realm *nibbāna* was totally outside the jurisdiction of the king and so the activities of those one-pointedly engaged in attaining salvation, i.e. the monks, also fell outside those social obligations. *Nibbāna* was regarded as the antithesis of the world of social relations. But having spiritualised the social domain, making it an integral part of the path to personal salvation, this traditional monarchical ideology of the *cakkavattin* which provided the doctrinal justification for social relations in traditional Buddhist societies is inadequate for Buddhadāsa's purposes. For he must show that social relations are not simply an obligation to an external temporal-cum-spiritual authority but are integral to one's own spiritual practice and to the attainment of one's personal salvation. Buddhadāsa attempts to demonstrate the necessary relation between social and spiritual practice by proposing that **not** to help or assist others who are in need is to suffer from the same self-centredness which bars one from spiritual attainment,

> Religion doesn't only mean the actions of individuals to pass beyond suffering. We must still help others to pass beyond suffering also. That is, we must have lovingkindness [*karunā*] towards our fellow man and towards all sentient beings, because if we are completely without lovingkindness we will be a self-centred person ... As is said in the Pali words of the Lord Buddha in the *Nipāta Sutta* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* ..., "A person who only has wisdom in seeking out their own benefit is an impure human being ..." Hence a religious person must assist others as one type of necessary human duty, or else it will be to have a religion in words only.(T)[49]

Unlike Buddhaghosa Buddhadāsa regards lovingkindness as denoting explicitly assisting others, and not simply as the development of the intention of benevolence.

Buddhadāsa also claims that every human being must be a member of the world society and that all have three unshirkable duties: to nature, such as nourishing the body and maintaining a healthy physical existence; to *dhamma*, to be upright and moral and so maintain a healthy mental life; and thirdly, to relate together in a peaceful social life,

> Whoever evades these duties as a matter of course forfeits their humanity or their membership of the world society. Even though they are still alive

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[49] id., *Hāk Khōrmūnit' Khau Mā Phutthasāsanā Kor Yang Yū Dai* ("หากคอมมูนิสต์เขามาพุทธศาสนาก็ยังอยู่ได"), pp.26-27.

it is as if they are already dead.(T)[50]

Buddhadāsa also says that serving others is a good opportunity to make merit. However, here he carefully distinguishes his phāsā-tham interpretation from the popular view of merit as being some metaphysical quantity which can be accumulated through good deeds and whose amount determines the quality of one's rebirth, and ultimately one's salvation. In order to clearly dissociate himself from such popular interpretations of merit making Buddhadāsa gives the warning that,

> Of all tempting things there is nothing more tempting than merit. So he [the Buddha] said that merit is *upadhi* (that is, it is also a bait of *kilesa*) ... Because merit inevitably leads to birth in one realm or another, if not in the condition of a human then as a *devatā*. That is, it is an instrument that keeps us always swimming in the cycle of mental birth and death.(T)[51]

Buddhadāsa also dissociates himself from the popular view that merit is best acquired by giving alms to monks, citing the *Navaka Nipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and saying that the Buddha taught that,

> Developing awareness of change [*aniccasaññā*] for just as long as it takes to click the fingers has more effect, or more merit value, than providing meals for the whole *saṅgha* along with the Buddha as leader.[52]

For Buddhadāsa merit is not something stored up for the sake of going to heaven. Rather, to perform merit (Thai: tham bun) is to act selflessly for the benefit of others in order to reduce the power of deluded self-centred thoughts in one's life and consequently to also reduce the suffering self-centredness produces.

8.7.1 Buddhadāsa's De-emphasis on *Kamma*.

Buddhadāsa also indirectly shows the need for Buddhists to help others progress and to be involved in social welfare activities by avoiding talking of suffering and poverty in terms of *kammic* retribution,

> We should regard poverty and being in material need as a person's greatest bad luck or as the most pitiful kind of basic human bad luck. We

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[50] ibid. p.27.

[51] id., *Bā Bun - Bā Sawan* ("บ้าบุญ – บ้าสวรรค์" *Mad Over Merit - Mad Over Heaven*), Ongkān Fŷn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā (องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา), Samutprakan Thailand, 2518 (1975), p.6.

[52] Buddhadāsa, *Buddha-dhamma for Students*, p.44.

must not be indifferent towards those who are yet in need.(T)[53]

When, as in traditional Theravāda Buddhism, physical or material suffering is seen as just and moral retribution for past misdeeds is regarded as something inevitable and unavoidable then the theoretical basis for helping others overcome material difficulties is very weak. And it is in order to promote his re-interpretation of Theravāda doctrine as a Buddhist ideology of social welfare and socio-economic development that Buddhadāsa instead speaks of poverty in a way that attempts to overcome the traditional acquiescence and moral indifference by arousing sympathy for others' suffering.

The notion of *kamma* and of fate is significantly underplayed in Buddhadāsa's system. In Buddhist teachings the suffering of *kamma* or fate is regarded as misfortune which cannot be avoided. But because Buddhadāsa regards some of the major sources of physical suffering, such as hunger, disease and ignorance, to now be amenable to eradication or at least to amelioration then such suffering is no longer included within the category of inevitable and unavoidable suffering due to *kammic* determinants. By contributing to the elimination of material suffering modern technology and education in certain circumstances have the potential of relieving what has traditionally been regarded as fated and inevitable suffering. Thus it is to be expected that fate and the inevitability of material suffering will be de-emphasised by Buddhadāsa, who wants Buddhists to take advantage of the benefits of modern technological developments. When Buddhadāsa does mention suffering he talks more of mental unease and dis-ease, aspects of human life which are as much a part of modern material culture as of any past society. Buddhadāsa regards Buddhism as a solution to mental ills and mental suffering, being happy to leave the improvement of material well-being and the ending of material suffering to scientists and technocrats.

As in other aspects of his re-interpretation of Theravāda doctrine Buddhadāsa does not re-interpret the doctrine of *kamma* by denying traditional interpretations out of hand but by providing an alternative emphasis and a new focus on the notion. Buddhadāsa nowhere denies that personal suffering of whatever character is in fact a result of *kammic* reactions, determined by previous actions performed with ignorant attachment. However, he chooses not to talk of suffering in a way that emphasises its inevitability and human inability to change it. In line with the propagation of an ideology proclaiming that human beings are responsible agents

53 **Phutthathāt,** *Hāk Khōrmūnit Khaw Mā Phutthasāsanā Kor Yang Yū Dai* ("หากคอมมูนิสต์เข้ามาพุทธศาสนาก็ยังอยู่.)" p.33.

capable of actively changing their circumstances for the better he chooses to focus on those aspects of human suffering which are open to amelioration and able to be softened by the provision of one or other form of material assistance. The primary focus in Buddhadāsa's system is on suffering which can be ended by another's assistance.

8.7.2 Difficulties With Buddhadāsa's View on *Kamma*.

However, by de-emphasising *kamma* and the related notions of merit and demerit in an attempt to provide an ethical justification for involvement in the world Buddhadāsa simultaneously undermines the traditional political legitimating role of Theravāda Buddhism. Traditionally the Siamese king has been regarded as the person with the greatest merit in the kingdom and to hold the highest secular rank by virtue of that merit. As Keyes observes,

> Not only was the right of a man to occupy the throne legitimised in the popular mind by the idea that only a person with an exceptionally meritorious component to his *karmic* legacy could occupy the throne, but it was also believed that the welfare of the kingdom during a man's reign was dependent upon the degree to which he possessed a "merit" which could be shared with his subjects.[54]

Historically the welfare of the kingdom has been regarded as being tied up with the individual merit possessed by the king. This ideology of kingly merit has changed somewhat since the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932 but despite transformation it does remain, as indicated in popular rituals where a holy merit-transferring thread or sāy-sin (   ) is connected to both a picture of the king and to a Buddha image. This ritual symbolises the idea that the source of merit, in the sense of a "merit" whose benefits can be shared by all who participate in the ritual, lies at the top of a spiritual hierarchy where the *saṅgha* and the monarchy link. Keyes continues,

> The King is conceived of today, as in the past, as being the one with by far the greatest legacy of merit of any within the realm. This conception of the King as "having merit" serves today, as in the past to legitimise the contemporary socio-political order. The political leadership of the country are known to receive from the King their [symbolic] mandate to rule.[55]

Thus when Buddhadāsa in effect denies the notion of participatory merit[56] and

[54] Charles F. Keyes, "The Power of Merit", in *Visakha Puja*, Buddhist Association of Thailand, Bangkok, 2516 (1973), p.98.

[55] ibid. p.100

[56] See Appendix 1 for a discussion of participatory merit.

even the spiritual significance of *kamma* **per se** he simultaneously undermines the basis of Buddhism's use as a means of popular political legitimation. However, it is not only Buddhadāsa's critical view of *kamma* which undermines Buddhism's traditional political legitimating role. His concern to demythologise Theravāda Buddhism also leads him to discard what in Thai history has been the most important Buddhist text justifying the monarch-led social order, the *Traibhūmikathā* of Phra Yali Thai. The elaborate cosmological descriptions of the *Traibhūmikathā* have traditionally been taken as describing the various levels of heavens and hells attained to as a result of different qualitative and quantitative accumulations of merit and demerit. As a result of Buddhadāsa's denial of both participatory merit and the traditional Thai view of society and the cosmos, based on the notions which are contained in the *Traibhūmikathā*, Theravāda Buddhism's social and political legitimatory role is seriously jeopardised. If Buddhism is to be the progressive social ideology which Buddhadāsa and his supporters desire it to be there is therefore a need for a new Buddhist theory to provide legitimacy for Thai political forms.

While not defining the problem so clearly it would seem that Buddhadāsa regards the following Buddhist principle as underpinning a contemporary social order which takes its legitimacy from Buddhism, namely, the promotion of welfare in such a way as to enable the populace to strive for *nibbāna*. Political legitimacy then would not flow from symbolic association with or participation in the King's merit but rather from the visible, individually practised morality of political and social leaders. That is, the new Buddhist legitimacy would lie in individual merit, in both the Western and Buddhist senses, not in mere association with the traditional symbols of authority. This notion of Buddhist "meritocracy" is dealt with further in the next chapter when discussing Buddhadāsa's idea of *dhammocracy*.

However, Buddhadāsa himself presents no explicit resolution of the difficulties of needing to provide, firstly, a doctrinal ethical justification for social action and, secondly, a new interpretation of the ideological relation between Buddhism and the Thai state. And these omissions, both manifested at points of juncture between his re-interpreted theory and actual social practice, are further indications of the inadequacies and contradictions of Buddhadāsa's social thought. While socially important Buddhadāsa's social thought has few of the insights and penetrating analyses of his work on Buddhist doctrine and spiritual philosophy. This does not mean that the issues dealt with in his social thought are in any sense less important than his work on spiritual philosophy. On the contrary, the future of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand will be determined by how the *saṅgha*

administration and lay Thai Buddhists resolve the questions raised by social, economic and political change. What the flaws in Buddhadāsa's social thought do reveal, however, are the tensions created in Theravāda Buddhism between the relative freedom in the domain of doctrinal interpretation and the enforced conservatism of practice within the *saṅgha*.

8.8 Mahāyāna Influences on Buddhadāsa.

In the process of developing a Theravāda social doctrine Buddhadāsa maintains that aspects of suffering may be softened if not ended through another's benevolent assistance rather than through one's own moral effort and spiritual insight. This seems to imply that at least part of the way to salvation, i.e. the ending of suffering, can be attained through no effort of one's own but rather through a gracious external intervention. Such a view has similarities with the doctrines of some schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism which teach that salvation can be attained through faith in the liberative grace of either the Buddha or a Mahāyāna saint, a *bodhisattva*. This tendency of Buddhadāsa's Theravāda social doctrine to incorporate asepcts of Mahāyāna Buddhism further indicates that his interest in Zen and Mahāyāna, as detailed in Chapter Seven, is not accidental but is a direct result of introducing a doctrine of spiritually oriented social action into a religious system where salvation has heretofore been regarded as the result of individual moral effort. However, when action to end the social problems which inhibit others attaining *nibbāna* is also regarded as part of one's own spiritual work for attaining personal salvation it follows that those welfare-minded activities also contribute towards other people's spiritual salvation. In other words salvation is no longer something attained wholly by private effort in isolation from others. *Nibbānic* salvation now becomes a more social phenomenon where one person's benevolent assistance may positively contribute to another person's spiritual enlightenment.

As already noted in the previous chapter the Mahāyāna-like character of Buddhadāsa's thought also derives from his universalising the doctrine of salvation from suffering by ending the monk-lay distinction. As Rupp notes, Mahāyāna has always been,

> a more comprehensive path. From its inception laymen as well as monks have been more integral to its program than in the typical Theravāda position. And the *bodhisattva* ideal articulates explicitly an active concern with the destiny of all beings, a concern which only remains implicit when the [Theravāda] ideal of the *arahat* is dominant.[57]

[57]Rupp, p.64.

The Mahāyāna-like tendencies inherent in Buddhadāsa's notion of spiritual practice as incorporating social welfare activities are further demonstrated by his stated emphasis on the *bodhisattva* rather than the *arahant* as the Buddhist spiritual ideal. The Theravāda saint or *arahant* is honoured for his or her personal attainment of salvation. On the other hand the Mahāyāna saint or *bodhisattva* is honoured because of his or her compassionate vow not to enter ultimate *nirvāṇa* until every sentient being has also reached that exalted condition. In Mahāyāna teachings a *bodhisattva*, unlike an *arahant*, is regarded as having the ability to positively assist others to attain *nirvāṇa*. Buddhadāsa says,

> We should consider the kind of individual who is called the "blessed *bodhisattva*". That is, a person who sacrifices the benefit or personal happiness which he should get himself, in order to help others to pass beyond suffering ... In Mahāyāna there is a tenet which holds that the blessed *bodhisattva* should accept a moral principle with the gist that, "We will strive to help every last one of those who have fallen into suffering before we will permit ourselves to enter the blessed *nirvāṇa*." This is the highest ideal of helping others or of aiding one's fellow man who is in need of both physical and mental sustenance, a situation which is a complicated social problem at the present time.(T)[58]

However, this should not be taken as meaning that Buddhadāsa has completely abandoned the *arahant* ideal for there is a sense in which the *arahant* and the *bodhisattva* are compatible notions. While in popular Mahāyāna cults it is believed that faith in *bodhisattvas* is sufficient to elicit their saving grace, as was seen in Chapter Seven Buddhadāsa explicitly rejects such notions. For Buddhadāsa a *bodhisattva* is an *arahant* who teaches, guides and actively assists others along the path to salvation but who, unlike popular Mahāyāna saints, does not possess the ability to walk along that path on his or her disciple's behalf. Buddhadāsa's *bodhisattva* is therefore a development of rather than a denial of the Theravāda ideal of the *arahant*. Once again the change represented by Buddhadāsa's re-interpretation is a matter of refocussing or of re-emphasising notions rather than of the outright rejection of traditional Theravāda doctrines.

8.9 Conclusions.

While moral education is central to Buddhadāsa's solution for social problems it has its effect through people actually practising cit-wāng and lessening the power of self-centredness in their lives. The selflessness of acting with cit-wāng is regarded

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[58] **Phutthathāt,** *Hāk Khōrmūnit Khqu Mā Phutthasāsanā Kor Yang Yū Dai* ("หากคอมมูนิสต์เขามาพุทธศาสนาก็ยังอยู่ได"), p.30.

as solving social problems in two ways. Firstly, by reducing self-centredness through the practice of cit-wâng the divisiveness and greed behind so many problems of poverty and oppression will be ameliorated. And secondly, the welfare-minded practice of aiding those in need, while lessening personal self-centredness, also concretely helps the victims of injustice and poverty overcome the social barriers which prevent them from following the path to end suffering. Cit-wâng or ending self-centredness is therefore the pivot both of Buddhadâsa's interpretation of the Theravâda doctrine of liberation and of his social thought.

Cit-wâng not only has subjective benefits in leading the practitioner towards salvation but it also has objective social benefits in promoting the realisation of *nibbâna* as a social goal.

The dissolution of the distinction between personal and social activities and of the difference between subjective and objective results manifests in the structure of Buddhadâsa's system of thought his overriding concern to make the material world as much a domain of spiritual activity as the inner recesses of the contemplative's mind. In the following quote Jayawardene[59] summarises well the traditional Theravâda view of salvation to which Buddhadâsa is opposed,

> Suffering (*dukkha*) is man's own creation. It is not a quality of the external world, nor is it the effect of the external world upon one's self. Man can therefore eliminate suffering by his own efforts ... suffering arises when our desire is in conflict with the phenomena that surround us. We can, however, change our desires, and the Buddha recommended this way.[60]

In contrast, for Buddhadâsa the suffering of oppression and social turmoil born of greed **is** a quality of the external world. And what is more human beings **can** change the phenomena that surround them in order to end or at least alleviate suffering by action inspired by *dhamma* and performed with cit-wâng. Instead of ending suffering by adjusting our desires to the world Buddhadâsa maintains that suffering can at least in part be ended by adjusting the world to our desires for spiritual and material well-being.

Were Buddhadâsa, like most Thai monks, to retain the traditional division between clerical and lay Buddhism rather than attempting to create an integrated, comprehensive religion of individual salvation he would have few difficulties in bringing notions of economic development and modernisation into Buddhism. But he

[59] Julius R. Jayawardene is now the President of Sri Lanka. The quote here is taken from a lecture given when he was Finance Minister of the then Ceylon.

[60] Julius R. Jayawardene, *Buddhism and Marxism*, Pamphlet of the text of Tenth Anniversary Lecture to the Ceylon University Brotherhood, Colombo Ceylon, 6th March 1950, p.4.

effectively excises that traditional lay-social aspect of Buddhism in attempting to interpret anew from first principles the Buddhist doctrine of salvation. Consequently, wanting his interpretation to function as a guide for productive and beneficial social action he must integrate a traditionally world-renouncing doctrine of salvation with active world involvement. At a theoretical level he must show both that the world and *nibbāna* are not in contradiction and that sociality or involvement with others for the purposes of social development is necessarily related to and in harmony with personal spirituality. As seen above Buddhadāsa argues for both of these positions. However, his arguments are ultimately unconvincing, not because of any specific theoretical lapse but rather because of the glaring contradiction between his promotion of a socially involved doctrine of salvation and his own traditional and conservative segregation of the monk from worldly activity. At the same time as presenting a systematic re-interpretation of Buddhist doctrine which effectively abolishes the distinction between religious and world-involved activity he maintains that the *saṅgha*, and here he includes himself, should not engage in social welfare activities. The ideal that emerges from Buddhadāsa's thought is not that of a renunciate *arahant* monk but of a world-involved *bodhisattva*-like layperson who simultaneously works for personal salvation and social welfare by following the practice of cit-wāng. What role the monk plays in his reformed view of Buddhism is, however, unclear.

Buddhadāsa propagates an alternative Thai Buddhist ideology, but it is an ideology of a spiritually independent and socially active layperson not of the monastic isolation he himself practices. The place of the monk and of the *saṅgha* in his ideology of spiritual activism is extremely problematic. Anan Sēnākhan's and Bunmī Mēthāngkūn's criticisms that Buddhadāsa seeks to destroy the *saṅgha* by sending monks out to till the fields, while overstated, do have some substance. Buddhadāsa's ideas have significant implications for the interpretation of the doctrine as well as for the institution of Buddhism in Thailand. However, in striving one-pointedly for both doctrinal consistency and contemporary relevance he fails to consider the practical issue of Buddhism's institutional role in Thai society. And in the absence of a practical orientation to the realities of institutional Buddhism's place in Thailand the overall success of Buddhadāsa's attempt to develop an interpretation of the doctrine with direct contemporary relevance can only be regarded as being seriously in doubt.

CHAPTER 9

BUDDHADASA'S POLITICAL WRITINGS.

In addition to presenting a general social doctrine of spiritually-based activism Buddhadāsa has also made a number of comments upon and criticisms of more specifically political issues. However, his views cannot be categorised as either following the pattern of any existing political ideology or as supporting the programmes of any Thai political party or movement. Buddhadāsa's statements on politics are always general and he avoids making remarks on specific political debates and current controversies. He is more concerned with setting out what he regards as correct Buddhist principles for the operation of politics rather than with acting as a Buddhist critic of political events.

Fundamental to Buddhadāsa's conception of politics is the principle that all political doctrines and political activity should be judged against a spiritual criterion. For Buddhadāsa any political form is good or beneficial if it enables or encourages the populace to reach towards *nibbāna* by uprooting self-centredness and establishing both social and individual peace. What might be considered the traditional goals of political activity, such as promoting the production of a society's wealth or attaining socio-economic equity and justice, are by no means unimportant in Buddhadāsa's view of politics but are not regarded as having intrinsic value in themselves. Rather, for Buddhadāsa the production of material wealth and the promotion of social equity only have value inasmuch as their attainment permits or encourages the populace to further their spiritual interests. In other words what are commonly taken as ends in traditional political thought are regarded as means by Buddhadāsa, means towards the attainment of a final spiritual end which he calls *dhammocracy*[1] or the rule of *dhamma* in the world. Buddhadāsa consequently takes a utilitarian approach to the traditional political ideologies and systems, none of which he regards as having any inherent value apart from their capacity or potentiality for promoting *dhamma* in the world. This political utilitarianism is

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[1] I translate the Thai term <u>thammāthipatai</u> (ธรรมาธิปไตย) as *dhammocracy*. However it should be noted that the Thai word is derived from a much older Pali term, *dhammādhipateyya*, which literally denotes, "the dominating influence of *dhamma*".

shown most clearly when Buddhadâsa says, "When there is *dhammocracy* it could be a dictatorship, a democracy or whatever."(T)[2]

9.1 Buddhadâsa on Capitalism and Communism.

Buddhadâsa's lack of commitment to any existing political ideology is further shown by his equally vehement criticisms of the principles and operation of both capitalism and communism. As already noted in Chapter Eight Buddhadâsa has expressed particular concern about the poverty, oppression and exploitation which prevent people from following the path to *nibbâna*,

> When the country is made up of individuals who are destitute and desperately poor and the farmers are poor, starving and weak how can the nation be secure? They, the pillars of the nation, will be rotten and worn away.(T)[3]

In stark contrast to many politically conservative Thais Buddhadâsa maintains that communism **per se** is not a threat to Thailand but rather the exploitation and oppression which lead impoverished people towards communism and violent revolution,

> We are experiencing the problem that these evil-minded capitalists are sucking the blood of humanity to such an extent that the poor must rise up to fight and destroy their enemy, flooding the world with blood.(T)[4]

Buddhadâsa regards the fundamental threat to Thailand's national security as lying not in communism but in exploitative capitalism. However, he does not regard capitalist exploitation to itself be the ultimate source of political problems. Buddhadâsa maintains that exploitation has its roots in the ignorance, delusion and attachment which are the causes of all suffering. Because of the dominance of a materialist mentality, that is, of a deluded attachment to material wealth, Buddhadâsa says that capitalists have used the potentially beneficial social and technological developments associated with industrialisation and mechanisation to greedily hoard wealth. The systematic greed of capitalists has as a consequence created social conflicts between the impoverished workers and the wealthy capitalist employers. But Buddhadâsa also considers the communist ideal of workers and

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[2]**Phutthathât**, *Baramatham* ("บรมธรรม", p.53.

[3]id., *Kharâwât Tham* ("ฆราวาสธรรม"), p.6.

[4] id., *Thamma Kap Lôk Ca Pai Dûaykan Dai Rŷ Mai?* ("ธรรมะกับโลกจะไปดวยกันไดหรือไม"), p.7.

peasants overthrowing the capitalists as being informed by the same materialist greed which led to the original exploitation. In other words he regards the workers as being caught in the same traps of delusion and attachment as their capitalist employers.

Buddhadāsa's views on communism are neither wholly supportive nor wholly critical. Because of its materialist doctrines he does regard communism as being fundamentally incompatible with Buddhism,

> Communism cannot be the same as Buddhism. The main point which should be noted is that the principles of Buddhism do not teach that we should acquire anything as being ours.(T)[5]

That is, he regards the communist ideal of state ownership or ownership of the social wealth by the collectivity of the working class as being just another more general form of self-centred greed. But having said this Buddhadāsa still remarks of communism, "Yet it is still good; it has benefit for the world if it helps us to build up peace for the world."(T)[6] Insofar as communism ends the greed-based exploitation of the capitalists, which is at the root of the worker-capitalist conflict, it brings peace into the world and so from a Buddhist perspective should be regarded as good.

As already seen Buddhadāsa characterises peace as the main distinguishing feature of *nibbāna*. He regards peace as the prime social goal. The absence of peace, that is, wun-wāy or confusion and disorder, is seen as arising from delusion and attachment and from both craving and running after material things. Peace, on the other hand, is described as the characteristic of cit-wāng or of a mind freed from craving and attachment and from the self-centred delusions of "I"-"mine". Therefore, according to Buddhadāsa, when self-centredness is ended peace arises, both internally and externally, for he maintains that social conflict and disorder can be traced to the same self-centredness and material greed which produce inner, mental confusion. Buddhadāsa consequently uses the presence or absence of peace, defined as the absence of confusion or conflict, as his main criterion for determining whether the character of a society is either *dhammic*, i.e. spiritual, or materialist.

The practical question this then raises is how is social peace to be attained? In terms of a traditionalist interpretation of Theravāda doctrine social peace is realised if all individuals are peaceful in themselves. However, Buddhadāsa provides a more developed analysis of the sources of peace and disorder. While criticising the

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[5] id., "Upasak Hāēng Kān-phōēy-phrāē Tham" ("อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม"), p.28

[6] id., *Chāw Phut Thī Dī Yōrm Pen Khrit Thī Dī* ("ชาวพุทธที่ดีย่อมเป็นคริสต์ที่ดี"), p.26.

workers and labour leaders who attack capitalism for being as materialist as their capitalist opponents he also acknowledges that the formers' materialism is initially conditioned by the self-centred greed of the capitalists, and that worker-capitalist conflicts are primarily caused by the latter and not by the former. For Buddhadāsa peace is attained not only through inner, moral and meditative practice but also by combining this with morally guided social action directed towards ending the power of certain exploitative, greedy and self-centred sections of society. Peace is attained by both inner and outer action, not by either alone. It is for this reason that, as noted in the previous chapter, he criticises both those Buddhists who eschew politics because it is "dirty" (because they do not act in the world) as well as the communists (because they act only in the world without a moral base). However, Buddhadāsa does not go beyond this analysis to suggest a concrete political programme to overcome social conflicts. Rather, as analysed below, his solution to political conflict is moral and educational, to introduce Buddhist moral principles into political activity, rather than to undertake any specific ideologically aligned intervention in politics as such.

9.2 Buddhadāsa's Criticisms of Politics.

Buddhadāsa uses his interpretative theory of phāsā-khon - phāsā-tham to distinguish between what he considers to be the correct interpretations of social and political concepts and their popular, but erroneous, definitions. He says that politics without morality becomes corrupt and factionalised as self-centredness dominates minds and actions and causes confusion and turmoil. In contrast, in phāsā-tham, "Politics is [defined as] performing duties so that this world exists happily."(T)[7] That is, politics is, "arranging or acting so that the many, many people who live [in this world] truly live together in peace and happiness."(T)[8] By "happiness" Buddhadāsa means more than simple material pleasures. The happiness politics should promote is *dhammic*,

> *dhamma* which is politics will make the world pass beyond *kilesa*, harmfulness, evil and the self-centredness of "I"-"mine".(T)[9]

As a result of his proposition that political activity should be morally-informed

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[7] id., *Thammik Sangkhomniyom Bāēp Phadetkān* ("ธัมมิกสังคมนิยมแบบเผด็จการ"), p.5.

[8] id., *Thamma Kap Kān-myang* ("ธรรมะกับการเมือง" *Buddhism and Politics*), Thammathān Mūlanithi (ธรรมทานมูลนิธิ), Chaiya Thailand, 2522 (1979), p.6.

[9] id., *Thammik Sangkhomniyom Bāēp Phadetkān* ("ธัมมิกสังคมนิยมแบบเผด็จการ"), p.14.

Buddhadāsa maintains that party politics and political factionalism characteristic of Western democracies are outside his definition of politics, and are in fact a manifestation of immorality, "When there is no morality politics necessarily splits into parties and factions."(T)[10] For Buddhadāsa politics is an activity which should not only promote harmony but which should also proceed harmonioulsy itself, otherwise it is "dirty politics", or not a truly beneficial form of politics. This is Buddhadāsa's criterion for judging the appropriateness or beneficial character of political activity, i.e. good political activity is peaceful in itself and in its results. Buddhadāsa's opposition to the conflict inherent in the party politics of traditional democratic forms of government is, however, as much a Thai disdain of <u>wun-wāy</u> or confusion as it is a Buddhist dislike of disturbing the peace. As Morell and Samudavanija note,

> Participant politics requires confrontation, open conflict, discussion, argument; these have been disdained in Thai culture in preference for a passive stance on political issues, a stance which is dignified and basically non-commital.[11]

Buddhadāsa is by no means convinced that liberal democracy based on the two party system is necessarily the best political form,

> Liberalistic democracy opens the way for full freedom but doesn't clearly define what freedom is. Then people's *kilesa* snatch the opportunity to be free according to the power of those *kilesa*.(T)[12]

He suggests that an emphasis on political or social freedom without a corresponding degree of moral insight on the part of the populace can only mean freedom for *kilesa* to dominate social and political life. He emphasises this when he says,

> But it [democracy] is extremely dangerous, because if the common person is not yet good it will immediately turn the whole of this world into a hell.(T)[13]

Liberal democracy fails in Buddhadāsa's judgement because it does not lead to social conditions which promote morality or the attainment of *nibbāna*. In place of

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[10] id., *Cut-mȧy Khōrng Kān-syksȧ* ("จุดหมายของการศึกษา"), p.6.

[11] **Morell & Samudavanija**, p.28.

[12] **Phutthathāt**, *Thammik Sangkhomniyom Bāep Phadetkān* ("ธัมมิกสังคมนิยมแบบเผด็จการ."p.18.

[13] id., *Thamma Kap Lōk Ca Pai Dūaykan Dai Rȳ Mai?* ("ธรรมะกับโลกจะไปด้วยกันได้หรือไม่", p.17

liberal democracy Buddhadāsa proposes an alternative form of government which he calls a "dictatorial style of *dhammic* socialism". Buddhadāsa considers socialism to be, "more moral than other systems"(T)[14] because it restricts individuals' ability to accumulate material wealth, thus putting a check on the dangerous power of *kilesa* and of material attachment. He also values socialism because of its emphasis on co-operative rather than competitive social activities. Buddhadāsa's proposed *"dhammic* socialism" denotes a political form which does not simply aim to provide each person with the necessities of survival. Rather, it has as a higher goal the provision of social circumstances which enable each person to strive for *nibbāna* and, according to Buddhadāsa, such a spiritual form of socialism should proceed in a centralised, dictatorial manner.

Two justifications are provided for a dictatorial rather than liberal democratic form of *dhammic* socialism, the respective examples of the Buddha and of the first Buddhist emperor, As'oka. Buddhadāsa maintains that, "The Buddha himself had the principle or ideal of socialism but his method of working was dictatorial."(T)[15] That is, the co-operative way of life of the *saṅgha* or those striving for *nibbāna* was the Buddha's "socialism", but in laying down the details of the Noble Eightfold Path and the practices of the *vinaya* in elaborate detail the Buddha was also acting "dictatorially", in saying strictly how *nibbāna* was to be striven for. However, Buddhadāsa's model Buddhist polity is more specifically based on the historical tradition dating from As'oka's North Indian Mauryan Empire some two hundred years after the Buddha's death, for he primarily refers to the traditional notion of the Buddhist monarch. In arguing for a dictatorial style of Buddhist socialism Buddhadāsa refers to the *dasarājadhamma*, the ten traditional qualities of a Buddhist king[16], saying that they still have relevance in the modern world, *"dasarājadhamma* ... is the socialism which has the greatest benefit - a sovereign abiding by the *dasarājadhamma*."(T)[17] But rather than having a king Buddhadāsa implies that there should be a dictator with these attributes, for he says that the

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14 id., *Thammik Sangkhomniyom Bāep Phadetkān* (ธัมมิกสังคมนิยมแบบเผด็จการ), p.7.

15 ibid. p.39.

16 The *dasarājadhamma* or ten qualities of the royal *dhamma* are: (1) *dhana* - almsgiving, (2) *sīla* - to be moral and not under the influence of *kilesa*, (3) *parijjāga* - renouncing bad aspects of one's personality, such as self-centredness, (4) *ājjava* - honesty and integrity, (5) *maddava* - gentleness, (6) *tapa* - exercise of self-control, (7) *akodha* - not to be angered, (8) *avihiṁsa* - not causing difficulties or problems for others, (9) *khanti* - patience and forbearance, (10) *avirodha* - to be free from suspicion by not violating social norms.

17 Phutthathāt, *Thammik Sangkhomniyom Bāep Phadetkān* (ธัมมิกสังคมนิยมแบบเผด็จการ), p.49.

best and quickest way to attain spiritually beneficial social development is by having a dictator controlling a *dhammic* socialist state,

> This [*dhammic* socialism] is not a system which should be abandoned and it is not the absolute monarchy which is so hated. Perhaps this system will be able to remedy the world's problems better than other systems.(T)[18]

9.3 Buddhadāsa's Political Conservatism.

While Buddhadāsa calls for a centralised form of government under a Buddhist dictator it is clear that for him this is only a second best approach given that the Thai monarch no longer has legislative power. He in fact appears to have few objections to the now abolished institution of the absolute monarchy,

> If the King still fulfilled his duties like that [according to the *dasarājadhamma*] there would be no problems, because the king did not think, "This [national wealth] is mine." He thought only that it was society's, which is the people who give power to the king.(T)[19]

The traditional character of Buddhadāsa's views can here be gauged by the striking similarity between the above statement and an inscription of the fourteenth century King of Sukhothai, Ly-Thai, who praised himself saying,

> This king rules by observing the ten kingly precepts [i.e. *dasarājadhamma*]. He has pity on all his subjects. If he sees rice belonging to others he does not covet it and if he sees the wealth of others he does not become indignant.[20]

Buddhadāsa's conservative support for the institution of the absolute monarchy should be seen in the context of the important historical influence of King Mongkut on Buddhadāsa's ideas and practice, a matter which has already been discussed in Chapter Two. As absolute monarch King Mongkut not only reformed the structure of the Thai *saṅgha* by establishing the Thammayut Sect but also began the process of national modernisation which was so vigorously taken up by his son and heir, King Chulalongkorn. It must be remembered that senior members of the Thai royalty had a significant progressive impact on the Thai *saṅgha* until the first decades of this century. For example, Chulalongkorn's half brother, Vajirañāṇa (Thai: Wachirayān) was abbot of Wat Bowomiwet in Bangkok, the main

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[18] ibid. p.53.

[19] ibid. p.37.

[20] Cited in Trevor Ling, *Buddhism, Imperialism and War - Burma and Thailand in Modern History*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1979, p.20.

Thammayut temple, from 1892 and Supreme Patriarch of the Thai *saṅgha* from 1910 to 1921, when he had a lasting impact on Buddhist scholarship and the reform of the *saṅgha*. The absolute Thai monarchy under Rama IV and Rama V thus in many ways did have a progressive, modernist impact on the country and there is no doubt that it is this historical ideal which Buddhadâsa has in mind when he calls for a return of the monarchy. It is by and large since 1932 that the monarchy has become a symbol of conservatism and entrenched interests, especially since the dictator Sarit Thanarat successfully rehabilitated the monarchy and promoted it as a symbol of Thai unity to bolster his own autocratic, militarist regime in the 1960's. Since that time the Thai monarchy has in effect been aligned with the militarist interests in the country. The cutting edge of reform in Thailand thus no longer lies with the monarchy but with the disgruntled rising middle class and with those labour and peasant leaders who articulate the woes of the lower classes. In not recognising this historical shift Buddhadâsa politically aligns himself with the establishment, tending to alienate himself from the "new generation" of critical Buddhist thinkers in the new bourgeois.

Buddhadâsa's pronouncements on what he calls the "dictatorial form of Buddhist socialism" are his most specific comments on contemporary Thai politics. These ideas were developed and first published in the turbulent period of 1973-1976 when political polarisation in the country was heightened and overflowed into a polarisation of the *saṅgha* between rightist and left-aligned monks. This politicisation of the *saṅgha* was perceived by many, including Buddhadâsa, as threatening Buddhism's role as a symbol of national unity. Somboon Suksamran has described the leftwing groups of monks as espousing causes which could only be realised through political action, "such as campaigning for the underprivileged, Buddhism or nationalism."[21] On the other hand the more conservative sections of the politicised monks undertook political action in response to what they perceived as threats to their personal status, privilege and position because of the popularist activities and demands of the leftist monks. Politicisation of the *saṅgha* in the mid 1970s thus revealed within the order the same tensions which had become apparent in the broader Thai society.

In this confused and potentially dangerous situation Buddhadâsa, having no specific alignment with either the political right or the left, intervened by publishing his ideas on dictatorial Buddhist socialism, which he apparently hoped might be taken up as a mid-way position by the opposed political factions in the *saṅgha* as a

[21]**Suksamran**, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, p.7.

means of quelling the divisive disputes. Rather than directly face the political issues involved Buddhadāsa's solution relied upon a return to the established tradition of maintaining strict separation between the monkhood and social and political affairs. Buddhadāsa opposed the view that monks should be politically or socially active. While this explicit conservatism sits uneasily with his calls for the abolition of the traditional distinctions between the world-involved and renunciate forms of Buddhism it appears that the crisis within the *saṅgha* was so great that Buddhadāsa felt it could only be overcome by returning to traditional practices. Rather than seeking a resolution by openly debating the issues, which would most likely have led to the development of serious splits within the *saṅgha*, Buddhadāsa's call for monks to refrain from becoming involved in social issues was an attempt to cut off the means for the expression of dissent within the *saṅgha*. That is, he viewed the conflict within the *saṅgha* as essentially irresolveable, because of the danger of the *saṅgha* suffering perhaps permanent damage from the expression of factional interests. As a consequence he sought to prevent the peace-disturbing expression of either rightist or leftist views at the source. Somboon Suksamran comments on Buddhadāsa's intervention as follows,

> between 1973 and 1976 when ideological conflict was immensely intensified Buddhadāsa published his formulations of *dhamma* socialism [dhammika sangkhomniyom], a very complex and closely knit set of Buddhist ideas. It was intended to provide a Buddhist compromise between secular left- and right-wing ideologies. Though his ideas were exploited by both left- and right-wing political monks to suit their goals, essentially he had a conservative viewpoint which emphasised the duties and responsibilities of individuals to their religion, government, nation and their fellows.[22]

Despite his progressive and modernist reforms of doctrine and his promotion of a notion of Buddhist social involvement, as a result of the publication of his views on dictatorial socialism Buddhadāsa is by and large seen in Thailand today as a political conservative. He offers arguments which support strong, autocratic political control of the country rather than governments democratically elected by the Thai populace. Indeed, this ill-fitting political conservatism draws criticism from those who otherwise support Buddhadāsa's general reformist programme. Sulak Sivaraksa comments,

> I think a weak point of his [Buddhadāsa's] lies in this matter of "dictator", because dictators never possess *dhamma*, and it's like this everywhere because we abandon ourselves to having dictators. Even the abbots at almost every temple are dictators, including Buddhadāsa as

[22]ibid., pp.91-92.

well.(T)[23]

Like many of Buddhadâsa's supporters among progressive Thai Buddhists Sulak is a strong proponent of the democratic processes of government who finds it difficult to accept Buddhadâsa's pronouncements on the desirability of a dictatorial form of Buddhist government. Puey Ungphakorn, a prominent social scientist, echoes the thoughts and feelings of many progressive Thais when he says he sees the bases of a "good modern society" as being efficiency, freedom, justice and kindness[24]. This contrasts with Buddhadâsa's emphasis on responsibility over freedom, which leads to his relatively poor regard for the notion of liberal democratic government in which he says moral responsibility, the basis of Buddhist practice (*sīla*), is often thrown overboard in an unthinking championing of individualistic freedom.

9.4 Democracy and the Buddhist Tradition.

When considering Buddhadâsa's political conservatism and his criticisms of liberal democracy it is necessary to keep in mind that doctrinal Buddhism provides a weak basis for democratic principles. It is true that in the Buddha's time there were two competing types of government in North India, which can respectively be categorised under the rubrics of republican and monarchical. One of the most commonly mentioned "republics" in the Pali canon is the Vajjī region with its capital at Vesâlī, while Magadha with its capital at Rajagriha was a powerful monarchy in the Buddha's time. However, it should be noted that the term republic is rather loosely applied to such states as Vajjī, which Ling says would be better called aristocratic oligarchies, because the goverments of such states were composed only of leading men of the tribe belonging to the *ks'atriya* or warrior caste. However, as Ling notes, because of the expansion of the monarchies and internal feuding amongst the various republics there was a general, "trend towards an increase in the size and power of the monarchies at the expense of the republics."[25] Indeed, as a result of these forces all the republics had collapsed within a few years of the Buddha's demise.

Râjavaramunī notes that the Buddha laid down principles for guiding the governance of both the republics and monarchies of his day. That is, the Buddha

[23]Quoted in Khaṇakammakān Sāsanā Phya Kān-phatanā, *Phutthathāt Kap Khon Run-mai*, ("พุทธทาสกับคนรุ่นใหม่"), p.56.

[24]Ungphakorn, p.116.

[25]Ling, *The Buddha - Buddhist Civilisation in India and Ceylon*, p.50.

did not support one system of government over the other, but rather tried to ensure that the moral and religious welfare of the people was guaranteed whatever the political system (T)[26]. Buddhadāsa's comprehensive notion of *dhammocracy* and his political pragmatism therefore have well-established precedents in the Buddha's own treatment of the political divisions of his time. Nevertheless, Rājavaramunī also observes that the Buddha thought the monarchical system of government would dominate in the long term. On this point Ling comments that,

> Social stability appears to have been recognised by the Buddha as a necessary condition for the success of social and moral reconstruction. In the existing situation in North India in the fifth century B.C. the surest guarantee of social stability appeared to be in the direction of a strong and benevolent monarchy.[27]

Thus Buddhist teachings are by no means antithetical to democratic forms of government but by the same token neither are they strongly supportive. And given the considerably more extensive references to the *cakkavattin* (universal monarch) and to the royal qualities of the *dasarājadhamma* in the Theravāda canon, rather than to democratic ideals and virtues, Buddhadāsa's conservatism and the unease of democrats such as Sulak Sivaraksa are both understandable. Buddhadāsa's support for a strong, centralised, even dictatorial form of government appears to be based on a concern for maintaining the peace and social order he regards as being the foundation of the collective moral order of Thai society. Buddhadāsa's political conservatism, together with his conservatism in the realm of the practice of *dhamma*, are the main sources of dissatisfaction with his work and ideas among progressive Buddhists, many of whom support a much more militant or at least explicitly democratic formulation of Buddhism. But while at odds with many of his modernist supporters Buddhadāsa's views are at this point uncharacteristically in accord with those of the majority of Thai citizens who acquiesce in or support strong centralised regimes. Morell and Samudavanija observe,

> Although many intellectuals and some royalists would prefer otherwise, the remainder of society considers military rule or at least long-term military tutelage, as both legitimate and reasonable, and certainly important for the stability and order with which it is associated.[28]

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26 (Phra) **Rātchaworamunī**, *Phutthasāsanā Kap Sangkhom Thai* ("พุทธศาสนากับสังคมไทย" *Buddhism and Thai Society*), Mūlanithi Kōmon Khīmthōrng (มูลนิธิโกมลคีมทอง), Bangkok, 2526 (1983) pp.22ff.

27 **Ling**, *The Buddha - Buddhist Civilisation in India and Ceylon*, p.140.

28 **Morell & Samudavanija**, pp.57-58.

9.5 Contradictions between Buddhadāsa's Doctrinal Reforms and Political Conservatism.

But while there are both scriptural and cultural-historical precedents for Buddhadāsa's political conservatism there is nevertheless a pronounced discontinuity between his work on politics and the remainder of his otherwise reformist teachings. In developing his general re-interpretations of Buddhist teachings, as elaborated in the preceding chapters, Buddhadāsa has followed the method of returning to doctrinal fundamentals as expressed in the first sections of the *Suttapiṭaka*, that is, the *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and *Saṁyutta Nikāya*. His re-interpretations have been based on a selective reading of the Buddhist scriptures, concentrating on doctrinal texts and effectively ignoring historical, popular and non-doctrinal sections of the *Suttapiṭaka* such as the *Jātakas* and the *Petavatthu*, which contain views more aligned with traditional popular Buddhism than with Buddhadāsa's clerical doctrinalism. However, significantly these otherwise neglected texts, in particular the *Jātakas* or stories of the Buddha's previous incarnations, come to the fore in Buddhadāsa's political writings. For example, the *dasarājadhamma* or ten qualities of a righteous monarch, which Buddhadāsa cites in support of his notion of an ideal political leader, are drawn from the *Jātaka* Tales and not from the doctrinal core of the early sections of the *Suttapiṭaka*. That is, in his political writings Buddhadāsa's use of the Buddhist scriptures is inconsistent with the methodological approach taken in the remainder of his reformist work, creating a discursive discontinuity between his explicitly political and general doctrinal writings. This strongly suggests that these two areas of his work in fact operate under quite different constraints and according to different assumptions. The dissatisfaction of many of Buddhadāsa's lay supporters with his politically conservative anti-democratic views is a consequence of this fundamental dissonance between his political and non-political writings.

The reason for this discontinuity between Buddhadāsa's political and non-political work lies in the already noted contradiction between his conceptual integration of the spiritual and mundane levels of human activity but the ongoing practical separation of these two levels in his own life and in his treatment of the practical role of the *saṅgha* in modern Thailand. Political activity is necessarily and irredemably practical and world-involved and, given that Buddhadāsa has in his own life failed to resolve the dilemmas raised by clerical involvement in the mundane world, his treatment of political activity remains cut off and distanced from his other writings, in the same way that he has distanced himself and the *saṅgha* from active world-involvement. For example, Buddhadāsa's opposition to the

participant politics of liberal democratic forms of government is consistent with his own decision over fifty years ago to retreat from the confusions and wun-wāy of the political hierarchy of the *saṅgha* in a personal search for insight and peace.

However, the tensions underlying contemporary political conflicts, both in lay society and within the *saṅgha*, also appear to have introduced an external source of contradiction into Buddhadāsa's work. While the logic of his modernist views inevitably leads him towards the abolition of traditional distinctions in the teaching and practice of Thai Buddhism this abolition also has the potential of undermining the very structure of institutional Buddhism in Thailand. He clearly does not want the *saṅgha* to collapse, and perhaps it was only the events of 1973-1976 which made it clear to him that institutional Buddhism in Thailand was in fact threatened with being torn apart by the same tensions which he has been trying to resolve in his own work of reform and re-interpretation. However, Buddhadāsa has never acknowledged the potentially destructive implications of his work. Perhaps he does not see them, or perhaps he wishes to ignore them. Wherever the truth lies it is clear that his response to the political and religious crisis of the 1970s was an **ad hoc** reaction designed to preserve the *saṅgha* at all costs, even at the cost of creating inconsistencies in his own work and in his reformist programme.

The pragmatic character of Buddhadāsa's approach to politics is further indicated by a softening of his criticisms of liberal democracy in the years since 1976, when a return to relative social and political stability has permitted a partial and gradual liberalisation in Thai society. Buddhadāsa's more recent political comments in fact contradict some of his statements made in the mid 1970s. At a talk given in 1982 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Sūan Mōk Buddhadāsa gave the following reasons for why it was fitting for him, a monk, to talk about democracy, a political matter,

1. Because democracy was born in Thailand together with Sūan Mōk, they were both born in the same year [1932], although Sūan Mōk is one month older ...
2. Buddhism has in it the spirit of democracy. Buddhist principles, especially in the governance of the *saṅgha* have in them the spirit or conception of democracy...
3. We [as human beings] by nature have the characteristic of democracy in us ... That is, we are all "friends" of suffering, birth, aging, illness and death. We all have *kilesa* in us in the same way and suffer the same problems ... the idea of democracy exists in every person by the principles of nature.(T)[29]

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[29] **Phutthathāt,** *Fā-sāng Thāng Prachāthipatai* ("ฟ้าสางทางประชาธิปไตย" *Democratic Dawning*), Samnak-nangsў Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2528 (1985), pp.2-3.

The above seem the words of a totally different Buddhadāsa from the one who eight years earlier in 1974 called for dictatorial Buddhist socialism to remedy the confusing state of Thai society. Indeed the very title of the book the above remarks are taken from, *Democratic Dawning* (*Fā-sàng Thāng Prachāthipatai* - "ฟ้าสางทางประชาธิปไตย") stands in stark contrast to the tenor of his work on dictatorship. But while in recent years Buddhadāsa has increasingly shifted towards supporting the liberal democratic pattern he was earlier so critical of the change is not in fact so dramatic. He still maintains strong support for the notion of dictator or dictatorship (phadetkān - เผด็จการ), but is now careful to redefine what he means by this,

> The word "dictator" denotes acting resolutely ... If it has *dhamma* then a dictatorship is resolute and correct. Dictatorship is only a tool, a method that is resolute and decisive ... If it is used in a correct way it is good but if it is used wrongly it is bad.(T)[30]

This returns us to Buddhadāsa's politically pragmatic notion of *dhammocracy*, wherein all political systems are seen simply as tools or methods for obtaining "the rule of *dhamma* in the world", and in themselves have no inherent value. Buddhadāsa goes on to say that people have criticised his use of the notion of dictator,

> because they only know the tyrannical [thorarāt - ทรราช] destructive dictators and regards it, dictatorship, as a system of political ideals. But I say it isn't. The word "dictatorship" does not denote a political system but a tool which can be used for anything.(T)[31]

Yet despite these recent qualifications of his earlier criticism of democracy and support for dictatorship insofar as he maintains an essentially supra-political stance by calling all political systems tools, which are good or bad according to the moral character of the participants or leaders, Buddhadāsa is still, in strictly political terms, a conservative. This is because he is, as shown in 1974, prepared to abandon democratic principles if on his judgement the practice of democracy leads to too great a degree of social confusion. The democratic idealists among many of his progressive lay supporters, however, cannot accept this supra-political *dhammic* pragmatism and like Sulak part ways with Buddhadāsa at this point.

But while Buddhadāsa can be criticised for the contradictions introduced into his views by his political and practical conservatism it is necessary to remember

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[30] ibid. p.7.

[31] ibid. p.36.

that he is a monk and that as a member of the Thai clergy there are definite limits to what it is possible to say and advocate given the alignment of the *saṅgha* hierarchy with the state, and the resulting strictly enforced conservatism of the Thai monkhood. In addition, because of the strongly orthopractic character of Thai Buddhism, and in particular the significant orthopractic basis of spiritual authority, if Buddhadāsa were to challenge the traditional role and practices of the monk he would also risk losing the repute and esteem needed to authorise his doctrinal reforms. This is because in order to authorise doctrinal changes he must remain strictly orthopractic even if the new interpretations thereby developed imply a questioning or criticism of the orthopractic tradition itself. Given the severly limited scope for practical innovation in the Thai *saṅgha* Buddhadāsa, as a monk, in fact has no choice but to take a conservative stand and oppose *saṅgha* involvement in political affairs if he wishes his doctrinal reforms to be considered as legitimate interpretations of the *dhamma*. So long as he wishes his interpretations of Buddhism to be considered within the context of Thai Theravâda Buddhism, and not as the work of an isolated, unauthorised eccentric or maverick external to that tradition, he can do nothing but abide by or acquiesce in the narrowly defined, non-political and non-involved role laid down for monks.

The contradiction between Buddhadāsa's theoretical integration of the worlds of social action and *dhamma* and his own isolationist personal practice and conservative political views, is therefore in effect forced upon him as a monk of the official Thai *saṅgha*. Although in the face of real turmoil and conflict Buddhadāsa does appear to have in fact supported the traditional isolation of the monk from active social involvement he could not have decided otherwise, and remained a recognised and respected interpreter of **official** Buddhism, even if he did have more radical personal views. The contradiction in Buddhadāsa's work is in fact inherent in the institutional character of Thai Buddhism and could only be overcome either by an unprecedented reform in clerical practices or by a schismatic dissociation from the authority and controls of the official church. Buddhadāsa seems uninterested in either of these radical alternatives and so the contradictions between his life and work and between his political and non-political thought, in the final analysis, remain irresolveable.

Because he has in practice withdrawn from active world-involvement and because he does not want to engage in confrontational politics Buddhadāsa's suggestions for the realisation of his ideas of a Buddhist polity and social order avoid directly facing or threatening the power and authority of either the *saṅgha* hierarchy or the Thai state. As a consequence his suggestions remain unrealistic and

idealist, even if morally laudable. Nevertheless, in order to appreciate the total system of Buddhadâsa's work it is necessary to consider his suggested means of realising Buddhist ideals in the social world as he himself presents them. And by way of completing this study of Buddhadâsa's thought and work his views on the power of religion to effect social transformation are considered below in the final section.

9.6 Religion - Buddhadâsa's Solution for Social Ills.

Buddhadâsa considers the ultimate solution of social and political problems to lie in the development and application of morally informed knowledge or wisdom. For example, he sees both his spiritual and social thought as providing an alternative approach to the social reforms suggested by communists, a spiritual Buddhist way to attain peace. He maintains that communism only arises as a popular ideology when religion has decayed, and so restrengthening religion must be at the root of ending both the capitalist-caused social problems which communism addresses, as well as the perceived threat of communism itself,

> Communism will only arise when religion loses its power ... Whenever religion loses its power it no longer has influence over the minds of human beings and then people will of necessity become so selfish that they consider no other person. And those who endure this oppression and exploitation then must rise up to fight it.(T)[32]

And Buddhadâsa maintains that religion decays primarily because of misinterpretations of doctrine which, in turn, lead to the growth and spread of materialism,

> Whenever people think that mental matters are less important than material concerns communism will arise. If religion still has the correct teachings people will necessarily feel that mental things are more important than the material.(T)[33]

When religious doctrines are misinterpreted in the modern context religion becomes irrelevant to contemporary life and people are forced to look elsewhere, to materialist doctrines, in order to find answers to their current problems. Buddhadâsa's <u>phâsâ</u>-<u>tham</u> interpretations are therefore as important to his social doctrine as they are to his re-interpretations of Buddhist spiritual philosophy. He regards his <u>phâsâ</u>-<u>tham</u> interpretations as revealing the true relevance of Buddhist

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[32] id., "Upasak Hāēng Kān-phōēy-phrāē Tham", ("อุปสรรคแห่งการเผยแพร่ธรรม"), p.22.

[33] ibid. p.23.

teachings to modern life. He also considers these re-interpretations to provide the means to prevent people leaving Buddhism for materialism or communism because of disenchantment with the religion's conservatism and contemporary irrelevance. For example, Buddhadāsa regards phāsā-tham interpretation of "birth" or "life", as the arising of self-centredness, and his emphasis on salvation here and now as being correct views which, if widely understood, would prevent people becoming interested in communism,

> Our community of Buddhists is still too fatuously concerned with the next world, after death. In fact Buddhism doesn't fatuously place its hopes in the next world but is instead a system of correctly fighting *kilesa* here and now; with being able to completely eradicate thoughts and actions dangerous to humanity here and now for us to see [the results] in this life.(T)[34]

Buddhadāsa does not limit his criticisms of the failings of contemporary religion to Buddhism and sees similar misinterpretations in other religions as also promoting both the capitalist materialism which produces the social ills of poverty and exploitation in contemporary society and the communist reaction to these ills. He regards all religions as sharing a common phāsā-tham essence, the eradication of self-centredness and the re-attainment of cit-wāng, and sees all religions as having a vital role in solving the world's problems. He says,

> That which is called *nibbāna* is the result of holding to religion, to every religion. According to their preferences other religions do not call it *nibbāna* but the result of practising that religion in reality is that which we call *nibbāna*.(T)[35]

Buddhadāsa maintains that religions should realise their common nature and work collectively and co-operatively in fighting their common enemies. Rapprochement between religious traditions is consequently a central element of his programme to better the world,

> Looking on other religions as enemies is the height of stupidity; it is the greatest misunderstanding and the greatest danger to humanity. There is nothing in any religion that need make it an enemy of another religion. That is, if we look at the heart of the thing called religion we will feel that every religion wants to eradicate the feeling called "I"-"mine", or strong self-centredness. That is the core of every religion.(T)[36]

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[34] ibid. pp.26-27.

[35] id., *Ōsārētapphatham* ("โอสาเรตัพพธรรม"), p.217.

[36] id., "Upasak Hāeng Kān-phōēy-phrāē Tham" ("อุป สรรคแหงการ เผยแพร่ธรรม"), pp.24-25.

At the supramundane level of <u>phāsā-tham</u> Buddhadāsa says that there are no differences between religions and that we only, "separate out Buddhist, Christian, Moslem because we have not attained to the truth."(T)[37] By saying that every religion is at core the same Buddhadāsa not only attempts to build bridges between religions but also presents a justification for the importation of ideas from other religions into Buddhism. The extent of Mahāyāna and Zen influence upon Buddhadāsa's ideas has already been analysed in Chapter Seven, but there has also been an input from Christianity. Perhaps the most important influence from Christianity is the notion of God. Buddhadāsa says,

> The classification of religions into two groups, atheistic and theistic, is a very shallow classification and does not touch the real essence or meaning of religion.[38]

He attempts to breach the theistic-atheistic distinction by claiming that despite popular opinion to the contrary Buddhism does in fact have a God, arriving at this conclusion via a very Buddhistic reduction of the Christian notion of divinity to *dhamma*, or the law of nature. Buddhadāsa gives *dhamma* a fourfold theistic interpretation as follows:

(1) Nature, or the entire natural system of the cosmos.
(2) The laws of nature.
(3) Activity in accordance with the laws of nature, i.e. moral action.
(4) The results attained from abiding by the laws of nature.[39]

This definition is then used to argue that all of nature is what other religions mean by "God's body", the laws of nature are "God's mind", abiding by the laws of nature is to follow the desires or commands of God, and the result of such moral action is a gift or offering from God[40]. But Buddhadāsa does not only doctrinally link Buddhism and Christianity via the concept of God, he makes the much broader claim that Buddhists,

> can accept all the passages of Christianity [i.e. the Bible], if they are allowed to interpret the language of *dhamma* [<u>phāsā-tham</u>] in the Bible in

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[37] id., *Mai Mī Sāsanā* ("ไม่มีศาสนา" *There is no Religion*), Samnak-nangsȳ Thammabūchā (สำนักหนังสือธรรมบูชา), Bangkok, 2517 (1974), p.5.

[38] Buddhadāsa, *Christianity and Buddhism*, p.7.

[39] Phutthathāt, *Thamma Nai Thāna Latthi Kān-mȳang* ("ธรรมะในฐานะลัทธิการเมือง"), pp.3-4.

[40] ibid. p.8ff.

their own terms.[41]

These views, however, have not been well-received by some other Buddhists, particularly in Sri Lanka. An author identified only as "A. de S." says of Buddhadâsa's book *Christianity and Buddhism*,

> this book is an apology for Christianity and a subtle attempt to convert the Buddhists of Thailand ... The Office of Christian Education in Bangkok, from which the book comes, has chosen its propagandist and propaganda unwisely and erroneously, for the venerable *bhikkhu's* words will be like seeds cast on stony ground.[42]

One Amarasiri Weerarame criticises the theory of phâsâ-tham upon which Buddhadâsa bases his rapprochement with Christianity as, "so much bluff. There is no such thing as a common *dhamma* language serving as a common denominator to all religions."[43] Weerarame makes the realistic comment that,

> By trying to interpret away Christianity to fit into the thought and concepts of Buddhism he does violence to both Buddhism and Christianity.[44]

Weerarame concludes that Buddhadâsa, "is advocating a new brand of religion which is neither Christian nor Buddhist. It cannot be accepted by either party."[45] On this issue Buddhadâsa also has critics in Thailand, Sulak Sivaraksa accuses that,

> He always looks at things from a good perspective. In particular he sees other religions and other cultures through rose-coloured glasses.(T)[46]

That is, Sulak criticises the universalist character of Buddhadâsa's views of other religions which diminish the specific "Thainess" or national character of Buddhism which many progressive Buddhists like Sulak see as a bulwark against negative foreign cultural influence in Thailand.

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[41] **Buddhadāsa**, *Christianity and Buddhism*, p.7.

[42] **A. de S.** (no other name given), "Buddhist Monk's Apology for Christianity", in *World Buddhism* (Ceylon), May 1969 (B.E. 2513), reprinted in (Bhikkhu) Sivlibodhi (ed), *Buddhadāsa: Appearance and Reality*, Sublime Life Mission, Bangkok, 1971, pp.1-3.

[43] Amarasiri **Weerarame**, "Monk's Interpretation of Christianity", in *World Buddhism* (Ceylon), September 1969 (B.E. 2513), reprinted in (Bhikkhu) Sivlibodhi (ed), *Buddhadāsa: Appearance and Reality*, Sublime Life Mission, Bangkok, 1971, p.33.

[44] ibid. pp.35-36.

[45] ibid. p.36.

[46] Cited in **Khanakammakān Sāsanā Phya Kān-phatanā**, *Phutthathāt Kap Khon Run-mai* ("พุทธทาสกับคนรุ่นใหม่"), p.57.

But at least some Christians view Buddhadāsa's theories positively. Swearer, an academic and a Christian, says,

> Among the Thai Buddhists with whom I have talked it is generally agreed that Buddhadāsa is the most important as well as the most controversial spokesman for Buddhism in Thailand today. He is praised for his profundity in expounding the *dhamma* but at the same time is criticised because his erudition exceeds the understanding of the ordinary man. Others are unhappy with the originality of his thought asserting he does not expose the scriptures, especially the *Abhidhamma* ... Buddhadāsa stands alone as one of the most creative, profound and stimulating thinkers I have discovered in the Buddhist *saṅgha*. [47]

Sulak Sivaraksa retorts, however, that when considered seriously,

> There is no way that Christians can accept Buddhadāsa's rendering of the notion of "God". That Thai Christians do accept it is because it is beneficial for them to do so and because they are the minority in Thailand.(T)[48]

That is, Sulak maintains Buddhadāsa is in effect providing a Buddhist legitimation for a foreign, non-Thai religious form.

However, contrary to the Sri Lankans' claims Buddhadāsa is not in fact interested in opening the way for Buddhists to convert to Christianity. On the contrary his emphasis on the common unity of all religions is meant to re-inforce each person's commitment to their own religion,

> It is because of ignorance of the language of *dhamma* that one abandons one's own religion and embraces another. If one really understands the meaning of one's own religion in the language of *dhamma*, he will love his own religion just as he loves his own life.[49]

Indeed Buddhadāsa regards his phāsā-tham interpretations as actively preventing Thai Buddhists becoming Christian, saying that the superstitious accretions to Buddhism tend to make Thai Buddhists despise,

> their own religion, consequently they embrace Christianity which is comparatively new to them and has no such superstitious practices.[50]

Through appreciating his or her own religion in terms of phāsā-tham he wants

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[47]**Swearer**, *Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa and the Buddhist Reformation in Thailand*, p.6.

[48]Cited in **Khaṇakammakān Sāsanā Phȳa Kān-phatanā**, *Phutthathāt Kap Khon Run-mai* ("พุทธทาสกับคนรุ่นใหม่" , p.57.

[49]**Buddhadāsa**, *Christianity and Buddhism*, p.6.

[50]ibid. p.22.

each person to know that which is the highest and most profound teaching of that religion. And it is through an in depth appreciation of one's own religion that Buddhadāsa considers materialism and communism will be fought and defeated,

> Let each person have their own religion, enter into their own religion and then vigorously confront communism. Don't stupidly think that the coming of communism would end Buddhism. Buddhism is not in such a poor state, it is not so weak ... Buddhism must be like a mountain. When communism collides with that mountain it must die. We have and keep to the *dhamma* which is the heart of religion. It must resist communism.(T)[51]

This attitude differs markedly from that which has been put forward by Anan Sēnākhan, Phra Kittiwutthō and other religious conservatives, namely that communism is a great threat to Buddhism. Fighting communism has been argued as vital to national security because, given the belief that Buddhism underpins both the nation and the monarchy, the anti-religious stance of communism is regarded by conservatives as threatening the whole fabric of Thai society. Morell and Samudavanija note that the traditional accusation of various Thai governments' counter-insurgency propaganda was that,

> When the communists control a village they will force all the monks to leave the temple and thereby destroy the village's religious life.[52]

Buddhadāsa disagrees. Firstly, he sees the primary social problem in Thailand as exploitation - communism is simply a response to the self-centred and greedy hoarding of wealth by capitalists. And secondly, he thinks that communism is only seen as a viable response to exploitation when the religious response is either misinterpreted or dismissed as irrelevant because of misinterpretation. Buddhadāsa considers all forms of materialism to be threats to social well-being and to peace, and does not regard either capitalism or communism as in the long run being a better political form. And rather than attacking communism directly Buddhadāsa proposes that the truth of religions should first be more widely revealed and that a form of *dhammic* or religious socialism be built upon that universal spiritual truth. By this approach Buddhadāsa maintains that the materialism of both capitalism and communism are attacked simultaneously, in a spiritual and radical rather than merely symptomatic way.

Buddhadāsa is conscious of presenting a social theory which is neither capitalist nor communist and explicitly states that Buddhism, "doesn't agree with

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[51] Phutthathāt, *Mai Mī Sāsanā* ("ไม่มีศาสนา"), p.27.

[52] Morell & Samudavanija, p.229.

capitalism ... It isn't communism ... Buddhism is consequently neither strongly rightist nor strongly leftist."(T)[53] He also says,

> Buddhism is neither materialism nor idealism but a state of correctness between both; or to put it another way it is both kinds in proper proportion.(T)[54]

And Buddhadāsa would like to see Buddhism rather than capitalism or communism as both the religious and social ideology of Thailand, "If the majority of Thais were true Buddhists they would not prefer any ideology other than Buddhism."(T)[55] And in these few words Buddhadāsa reveals the nexus of social and religious motivations behind his work, and the reason for his qualified popularity among progressive Thai Buddhists. He desires a return to the "True Buddhism" as a means of ensuring the religion not only remains the most important Thai institution but also becomes a catalyst for the progressive transformation of Thai society.

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[53] **Phutthathāt,** *Hǎk Khǒrmūnit Khâu Mā Phutthasāsanā Kor Yang Yū Dai* ("หากคอมมูนิสต์เข้ามาพุทธศาสนาก็ยังอยู่ได้"), p.109.

[54] id., *Thammik Sangkhomniyom Bǣp Phadetkān* ("ธัมมิกสังคมนิยมแบบ."), p.11.

[55] id., *Hǎk Khǒrmūnit Khâu Mā Phutthasāsanā Kor Yang Yū Dai* ("หากคอมมูนิสต์เข้ามาพุทธศาสนาก็ยังอยู่ได้"), p.110.

CONCLUSION.

While Buddhadāsa is a theoretician and his contribution to Theravāda Buddhism lies in the realm of doctrinal and scriptural interpretation a simply philosophical analysis of his work would nevertheless fail to capture the full import of his intellectual impact. As discussed in the Introduction, because of the key role of institutional Buddhism in Thai political, social and cultural life, the theoretical and doctrinal aspects of the religion must also be viewed in terms of their extra-religious significance in the secular domain. Similarly, when analysing contemporary teachings on Buddhism it is as important to investigate the possible social sources of ideas and interpretations as it is to seek out theoretical precedents within the Buddhist tradition itself. In the Introduction I also argued that a social and philosophical analysis of Buddhadāsa's thorough review of Theravāda teachings should be undertaken with an attitude of sympathetic engagement. That is, Buddhadāsa's work should always be treated sympathetically by acknowledging the specific intellectual and socio-cultural contexts which he has worked within and drawn upon. At the same time, however, a philosopher should not refrain from engaging Buddhadāsa and making explicit the contradictions and limitations of his presentations of Buddhism.

These above methodological principles are necessary components of any analysis of Buddhadāsa's work which does not oversimplify the actual complexity of his contribution to Buddhist scholarship. And for this same reason, when attempting to present a conclusion or overall evaluation of Buddhadāsa's contribution to Buddhism it is also necessary to avoid overly simplified judgements. It simply is not possible to summarise the results of Buddhadāsa's fifty years of intellectual work in one or two pithy, easily digested statements. Rather, to be true to the man and to his monumental opus one must make multiple evaluations of the various themes which characterise his writings and which set his work apart from traditional and most contemporary Buddhist scholarship in Thailand.

However, before attempting to give any detailed evaluation of Buddhadāsa's life work it is necessary to make some general observations in order to provide a backdrop for the more specific criticisms and analyses. Traditionally Buddhism has

taught that salvation from suffering is attained by detachment from the world of impermanence, which it was assumed was beyond the power of individual human beings to change or better. In the face of the vagaries of nature and his fellow man the Buddha sought a permanent transcendent reality which could provide suffering human beings with an unshakeable spiritual refuge. In contrast to this traditional view of the world the thought of progressive, modernist Thai Buddhists is informed by the belief that the natural and social worlds can be transformed for the better and that human suffering can be ameliorated through the exercise of human will coupled with technological and political power. In his systematic re-interpretation of Theravāda Buddhism Buddhadāsa has attempted to develp a comprehensive view of human well-being in which neither transcendent *nibbāna* nor active world-involvement is either denied or given exclusive emphasis. He has attempted to subsume the polar opposites of "this world" and the "next world" into a unity which, he hopes, will retain all the truth and saving power of the Buddha's spiritual message while also affirming the material saving power afforded humanity through scientific knowledge and technological skill. In terms of the traditional role divisions of Theravāda Buddhism Buddhadāsa has attempted to integrate the renunciate's hope for salvation with the layperson's hopes for well-being and fulfilment in this world here and now.

It cannot be over-emphasised that in attempting this integration of the spiritual and mundane Buddhadāsa has embarked on a huge theoretical enterprise which is without precedent in the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand. His goal has been to theoretically reconstruct the entirety of Theravāda doctrine in accord with re-interpreted doctrinal principles. In this effort he has displayed an unparallelled intellectual ruthlessness, being prepared to reject and denounce any views or interpretations which contradict his own radical presentation of doctrine, even if those views are contained in time-hallowed commentaries or the scriptures of the *Tipiṭaka* themselves. Before turning to consider the details of Buddhadāsa's review of Buddhist doctrine it must be acknowledged that the consistency and scale of his work in themselves give his work intellectual significance and stature. Not content to reform only a few details of Buddhist teaching Buddhadāsa has instead persistently mounted a radical attack on traditionalist interpretations of the doctrinal fundamentals of the religion.

To a philosopher and student of religion Buddhadāsa's grand programme of innovative reform is at once inspiring and challenging. Not only has he set about instilling vitality into the long-stagnant intellectual environment of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand but he has undertaken this task systematically and

thoroughly. Buddhadāsa inspires intellectual respect because his work incorporates both a grand vision of the total reform of an intellectual tradition and a scholarly concern for the detailed realisation of that vision. Neither a scholastic pedant nor a remote and abstract theoretician Buddhadāsa manifests in his work a rare integration of intellectual abilities.

Furthermore, the vision which has motivated Buddhadāsa throughout his life is one which is of universal concern in the modern world. Namely, the integration of the society- and world-transforming power of contemporary science and technology with traditional notions of humanity and with ethical and religious values. Buddhadāsa inspires respect not only because of the compelling intellectual power of his complete restructuring of Theravāda doctrine but also because of his keen awareness of contemporary religious and social issues. While his concern is with the place of Thai Buddhism in the modern world the issues he deals with are not unique to Thailand or to Buddhism. Despite the differences in theoretical and terminological details any Western thinker likewise concerned about human and religious values in the age of science cannot but feel sympathy for the ideal to which Buddhadāsa has devoted his life.

More specifically Buddhadāsa has made three major contributions to Theravāda Buddhism, at three different levels. At the level of the explicit presentation of Buddhist theory and doctrine he has presented a consistent demythologised view of the religion's teachings. By incorporating notions of scientific rationalism and by re-emphasising the implicit rationalism of doctrinal Buddhism Buddhadāsa has presented a radically simplified view of Buddhist teachings which systematically avoids metaphysical accounts of phenomena, whether physical or mental. At a more implicit level his rationalist account of Buddhism has changed the emphasis of the religion, focussing not on the transcendent or the metaphysical "other world" but on the immediacy of life here and now. Without devaluing the pivotal place and significance of *nibbāna* in Buddhist thought Buddhadāsa has related that condition of ultimate salvation to activity in the social world. Provided it is informed by moral principles and practised with <u>cit-wāng</u>, material activity oriented towards the progressive development of the social, economic and political orders is thereby given religious value, being viewed as part and parcel of the human quest for salvation from suffering.

Buddhadāsa's third major contribution to Theravāda Buddhism has been at the level of practice. With moral activity in the social world beign defined as part of the Buddhist religious quest Buddhadāsa has provided a justification for providing the layperson with access to the core of Buddhist teachings and practices which are

concerned with the attainment of *nibbàna*. No longer excluded from the inner sanctum of Buddhist teaching or practice, in Buddhadàsa's system the layperson is given spiritual rights and potentials equal to those of the monk.

But while giving due weight to the intellectual significance of Buddhadàsa's work one cannot overlook the fact that his system is not theoretically perfect or flawless. There are numerous theoretical contradictions and tensions in his work. For example, the pivotal interpretative theory of phàsà-khon - phàsà-tham is poorly argued for and its application is described in a vague and highly ambiguous manner. In addition, Buddhadàsa denies the authority of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, which provides the most definitive canonical source of the conceptual distinctions which underpin his own two language theory. There are also numerous places in Buddhadàsa's books, such as in discussions of rebirth, heaven and hell where the interpretations developed with the phàsà-tham - phàsà-khon theory come precariously close to an outright denial of the Buddha's own statements recorded in the core scriptures of the *Suttapiṭaka*. Because of his strong rationalist approach Buddhadàsa is prepared to reject sections of the scriptures which contradict or conflict with his strictly doctrinal interpretations. However, he also explicitly values the Buddha's recorded words in the *Suttapiṭaka* as a singularly authoritative source of interpretations of the *dhamma*. Despite this emphasis on the Buddha's own statements Buddhadàsa nevertheless does not acknolwedge or resolve the contradictions which arise when the Buddha himself is reported as saying something which is contrary to his own doctrinal re-interpretations. For example, the Buddha does in places explicitly describe rebirth and post-death states of being, which Buddhadàsa denies as being irrelevant to Buddhist spiritual practice. There are also lapses, omissions and inaccuracies in Buddhadàsa's use of other textual materials. His misinterpretations of Zen notions and the managed use of Zen texts to support his own reformed Theravàda views are one of the clearest examples of the inaccuracies in the details of Buddhadàsa's work.

But while his re-interpretations are flawed in many places by weak or unsupported arguments, by unacknowledged omissions from cited sources and by the failure to detail the contradictions involved in his views I do not regard these problems of detail to themselves invalidate or undermine Buddhadàsa's entire enterprise. Many of the logical or theoretical difficulties result from an inadequate elaboration of notions and arguments or from insufficiently detailed analyses. In several places, such as in the discussion of the sources of the phàsà-khon - phàsà-tham theory and in the interpretation of the *paṭiccasamuppàda*, I have shown that Buddhadàsa's position can often be vindicated by a clearer and more detailed

presentation of the arguments. The work of the Buddhist scholar Phra Rājavaramunī has been referred to on several occasions to indicate that many of the flaws in Buddhadāsa's work are not insuperable but can often be corrected by a more subtle and careful appreciation of the issues.

In re-interpreting Buddhist doctrine Buddhadāsa has always had the intention of effecting a practical reform in Thai Buddhism. However, it does not appear likely that his views will obtain the degree of general support necessary to effect significant religious reform in the immediate future. Of greatest importance to Buddhadāsa's long-term success in this regard is his recognition and acceptance outside of the small group of the Thai middle class and educated elite who constitute his main audience. However, it must be noted that while his work is of indisputeable theoretical importance Buddhadāsa's views are not popular amongst the broad mass of the Thai populace. A clerical follower of Buddhadāsa, Phra Prachā Pasannathammō, gives the following lament,

> But the leaders of society, whether of the worldly or religious spheres, have barely been influenced by these intellectual waves [of Buddhadāsa's work] in all these fifty years that have passed [since Buddhadāsa's mission began]. Even though each day people get to know more and more about both Sūan Mōk and Buddhadāsa, when we take stock of the actual situation we cannot say that Buddhadāsa's thought has any serious influence on Thai society.(T)[1]

It is often argued that the erudite and complex nature of his thought and the novelty of his prose style make him all but inaccessible to the average Thai Buddhist. Somboon Suksamran says,

> He [Buddhadāsa] has a considerable body of published work, but his level of thought is such as to limit its circulation to intellectuals. Though widely respected in Thailand as a saintly man who has divorced himself from the mundane concerns of *saṅgha* administrators, he is not essentially a political figure and does not command a political following.[2]

However, it is not only his language and style which cut him off from the majority of Thais. The very character of Buddhadāsa's views, which are highly critical of many traditional and still widely-accepted aspects of Thai Buddhism, prevent those views becoming widely popularised. Mulder describes Buddhadāsa and similar reformers as,

> propagating the Buddhist path as a solution for all worldly problems, the

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[1] (Phra) **Prachā** Pasannathammō, *Sī Nak-khit Rūam-Samay* ("สี่นักคิดร่วมสมัย"), pp.3-4.

[2]**Suksamran**, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, p.91n.

> idea being that, if the Thai say they are Buddhists, they had better be true Buddhists and organise their personal lives and society accordingly. This perspective is of course highly utopian and very much in contradiction with the meaningful structure of domesticated Thai existence.[3]

Religious reformers such as Buddhadâsa are by and large a tiny minority regarded as irritating rather than enlightening by the vast majority of Thais who also call themselves Buddhist.

In a sense Buddhadâsa is an ideologue without an effective social mouthpiece. He is not popular among peasants or workers or in the halls of power but only among a small group of like-minded intellectuals who, by and large, are disenfranchised from the actual decision-making processes of Thai politics and who stand in uneasy relation to the rest of Thai society. Modern journalists, scientists, students, authors, intellectuals and social critics do not yet appear to have found a place of general acceptance or acknowledged relevance in the changing Thai social system, and Sulak Sivaraksa realistically observes that,

> So long as those who govern the country still possess the power of carrying out *coups d'etat*, such as began in 1932, and so long as they still govern the land solely by military force they will not consider it important to listen to intellectuals.(T)[4]

The general rejection of Buddhadâsa's ideas even by many sympathetic Buddhists, and particularly by those highly placed in Thai society, is exemplified by the outcome of Buddhadâsa's debate with Khukrit Pramot, discussed in Chapter Five, over the compatibility of cit-wâng and social development. Commenting on this debate Mulder concludes that,

> Buddhadâsa maintained that *santosa* and *sunyata* are noble and constructive attitudes that are fully compatible with the requirements of modern life, but was never able to convince the pragmatist M.R. Khukrit, and for all practical purposes it would appear that Thai policy makers and administrators will decide about the acceptable contents of Buddhism in Thailand.[5]

The disenfranchisement of Buddhadâsa's main audience among critical,

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[3]**Mulder**, *Everyday Life in Thailand*, p.54.

[4] **Sulak** Siwarak, *Phuttha-thatsana Phŭa Kān-sāng-san Sangkhom Mai* ("พุทธทัศนะเพื่อการสร้างสรรค์สังคมใหม่" *A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*), Samnak-phim Thianwan (สำนักพิมพ์ เทียนวรรณ , Bangkok, 2526 (1983), p.3.

[5]**Mulder**, "Buddhism, National Identity and Modernity in Contemporary Thailand", in *Journal of Social Sciences - Chiangmai University*, Vol.2 No.2, September 1978, p.40.

modernist Buddhists from the exercise of real power in Thai society, is indicated by their, and Buddhadāsa's, overwhelming emphasis on a lay rather than a clerical or institutional form of Buddhism. To reform or modernise institutional Buddhism would be to confront and oppose its alignment with the state, and neither Buddhadāsa nor his supporters at present have either the power or the united will to overturn that relation. As such, religious and politico-cultural frustrations are released in marginal or peripheral developments, like the increasing emphasis on lay Buddhism and Buddhadāsa's own work, which do not affect the entrenched political or religious hierarchies.

Because of the entrenched conservatism of the Thai *saṅgha* significant changes in Buddhist practice and teaching are only possible outside the official religious hierarchy. As a consequence the most dynamic areas of Thai Buddhism are likely to be those least subject to the control of central *saṅgha* authorities, whether amongst the laity, in new heterodox organisations of the *saṅgha* (e.g. Phōthirak's establishment of a **de facto** third nikāy or sect in Thailand), or in isolation from the Bangkok *saṅgha* authorities, as in the forests of Southern Thailand. In aiming to reform Thai Buddhism Buddhadāsa first disengaged himself from the immediate authority and influence of the *saṅgha* hierarchy by retreating into solitary contemplation in the forest. But nevertheless, he neither disrobed nor split with the official Buddhist church, remaining, at least in name, within that church. This disengagement from the conservative authorities amounted to an admission that, in Mulder's words, any reformist activities he might have attempted in Bangkok would,

> never stand a chance to clean up the cobwebs of complacency and traditionalism that prevail in the higher levels of the [*saṅgha*] hierarchy.[6]

Buddhadāsa's return to his remote hometown of Chaiyā in 1932 was in effect a trade off, a withdrawal from attempts at changing the *saṅgha* from within in exchange for the freedom to innovate in areas outside the immediate jurisdiction of that hierarchy. In practice this has meant an emphasis in his work on Buddhism for laypeople, for the lay practice of Buddhism offered, and still offers, the greatest scope for change and adjustment to contemporary conditions of any section of Thai Buddhism. While removing himself from direct involvement with and opposition to the official hierarchy has granted Buddhadāsa a high degree of intellectual freedom it has not been without the cost of limiting the extent of practical reforms his ideas are capable of effecting. By having chosen an extra-institutional role for himself Buddhadāsa is thereby limited to an extra-institutional impact. In terms of the

[6]ibid. p.37.

institutional alignments of clerical and political authority in the Thai *saṅgha* and government Buddhadāsa's retreat from formal clerical associations to establish his own distinct following and centre of study in the remote south of the country has in fact functioned to siphon religious discontent away from the conservatively intransigent official clerical hierarchy. Buddhadāsa's failure to consider or directly deal with the entrenched power of the conservative *saṅgha* constrains him to act within the limits defined by that hierarchy and introduces into his teachings the fundamental practical contradictions discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Official Buddhism may more and more become a shell, a residue of magic, superstition and animism for some, a symbol of political and religious power for others. And correspondingly, the religious meaning of the Buddha's message of salvation may increasingly be found outside rather than inside the *saṅgha* - among laymen and laywomen rather than among monks. But unless and until the shell of institutional practice and ritual is in fact changed modernising and reforming Buddhist trends such as initiated by Buddhadāsa will have little or no impact on religious or social policy, or on state decision making. As such Buddhadāsa's relative fame and restricted popularity but ultimate impotence remain as a symbol of the divisions and unresolved tensions in Thai society caused by recent economic and socio-cultural change. For Buddhadāsa to seriously assist in resolving those tensions and to fulfil the promise of his early desire to concretely reform and modernise Buddhism would require him to move out of the realm of theory and step fully into the realm of action which he espouses but refrains from enterring.

However, it is unjust to judge the potential practical or social importance of Buddhadāsa's work by its short term failure to effect significant religious reform. Buddhadāsa's re-interpretation of Buddhism is built upon a modernist view of human existence which has yet to penetrate throughout Thai society. More than seventy percent of the Thai population are still rice farmers, most receiving no more than primary education and continuing to live in traditional village-based communities. If the process of modernisation continues in Thailand, if education levels increase and scientific methods of agriculture and industrial production become more and more the norm and, perhaps more importantly, if the population shift to the cities and towns does not slacken, then in the coming decades social conditions may be created in Thailand which favour a more general acceptance of Buddhadāsa's social and religious vision. After all, as argued in Chapter Two Buddhadāsa's views were themselves influenced by the very beginnings of social modernisation in Thailand in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If it is in fact the case that the widespread acceptance of modernist religious views is

dependent upon social and cultural modernisation then Buddhadāsa's teachings could only be expected to grow in popularity if the proportion of Thais participating in the non-traditional sectors of Thai society continues to grow.

However, by this I am not predicting a necessarily bright future for Buddhadāsa's views in the coming decades, although his work may well attain general popularity by the beginning of the twenty first century. There are counter-indications to the assumption that social modernism leads to religious modernism and rationalism. While the response of a minority of Thais, like Buddhadāsa and his supporters, to social change has been to seek a firm, unchanging basis for life by re-affirming the verities of the doctrinal core of Buddhism others have turned to popular animistic religious forms for support and solace. As Mulder observes,

> Animistic expressions of religion are very much on the increase, with more and more magically gifted monks, amulets and holy water, the veneration of potent images and shrines, and the practice of pure esotericism and magic to ensure good luck and supernatural blessings.[7]

In this context monks are not so much regarded as representatives or expounders of the *dhamma* as manipulators and mediators of a sacred magic which is regarded as ensuring protection and well-being. Even among many secular Thais there is a tendency to follow the ritualistic practice of religion rather than to be aligned with the modernism expressed by Buddhadāsa. This is because even though they may be uninterested in finding meaning in religion these secular Thais take the public practice of ritual as simply the way things are done and see more benefit in conforming to such officially sanctioned ritualism than in causing antagonism or ill-feeling by explicitly denying it like Buddhadāsa.

But whatever the future social conditions in Thailand there are, nevertheless, internal contradictions in Buddhadāsa's re-interpreted system which may have the capacity to limit the expanded impact of his views. These contradictions are not related to the errors, omissions and other theoretical flaws already mentioned above. Rather, they occur at a deeper structural level of his work, arising at the points where his ideas impinge on the social and practical domains. Most apparent here is the contradiction between Buddhadāsa's theoretical abolition of the distinctions between monks and laypeople but his personal highly conservative practice, which is based upon a retention of those traditional role divisions. There is also the further contradiction between his promotion of the notion of the right of all people, whether layperson or monk, to seek ultimate salvation through their own efforts but his

[7] ibid. p.44.

staunch belief that individual political rights should be forsaken in order to guarantee social harmony under a dictator.. Furthermore, not only does his own life provide no model of actually living the *dhamma* in the social world but his own life practice serves to re-inforce the traditional idea that spiritual practice requires a literal renunciaiton of the world.

The contradiction between Buddhadāsa's theoretical radicalism but conservative practice manifests in many ways, all of which raise doubts about the ability of his system to successfully fulfil his stated intention of making Buddhism relevant to the lives of contemporary people. The contradictions between theory and practice tend to alienate the very people Buddhadāsa has said he is most concerned to reach - the progressive, modernist and educated Thai laypeople. For example, Buddhadāsa's criticisms of liberal democratic forms of governemnt and his tacit support for the political **status quo** in Thailand are at odds with the democratic ideals of most progressive Thais. While having effectively isolated himself from the mundane concerns of *saṅgha* administrators Buddhadāsa is nevertheless not perceived as standing for a politically independent monkhood. His explicit support for the monarchy and authoritarian government tend to alienate a significant number of those who otherwise wholeheartedly support his modernising enterprise.

However, the structural contradictions in Buddhadāsa's work do not have only a sociological significance. They also raise the question of whether Theravāda Buddhist doctrine is in principle capable of being consistently re-interpreted in terms of a modernist world view. But I do not believe that Buddhadāsa's personal inability to effect the sweeping reforms he foreshadowed early in his career should be taken as indicating that Theravāda Buddhism is an inherently conservative religious form. It does not mean that Theravāda is incapable of adjusting its role and outlook in order to become an effective moral and religious voice in modern Thai society. At the level of doctrine Buddhadāsa has forcefully demonstrated that precisely the opposite is the case. Rather than being an other-worldly religion which deflects human interests away from the realities of concrete social existence Buddhadāsa has shown that Theravāda is in fact a highly adaptable system, with vast theoretical resources for reform and for development in new directions. By abolishing the religious distinction between the monk and the layperson Buddhadāsa has also abolished the doctrinal basis for the traditional pyramidal structure of religio-moral authority in the Thai *saṅgha*. This structure of religious authority is founded upon the traditional notion that only a spiritual elite has access to the truth of *nibbāna*. In contrast Buddhadāsa maintains that *nibbāna* is universally accessible because it is simply the deepening and development of the mind's natural

condition or cit-wāng. The notion of cit-wāng thus lays the foundation for a Buddhist ideology in which all people are regarded as equals, all possessing the moral qualities necessary to be autonomous, responsible individuals. Buddhadāsa's re-interpreted version of Theravāda belies any stereotypical claim that Theravāda is an inherently world-negating and elitist religion. One should not make the mistake of equating the scope and potential of such complex a religious and theoretical system as Theravāda Buddhism with its interpretation and practice in any particular period or place.

The contradictions of Buddhadāsa's re-interpretations are not at root theoretical but result from the impact of the conservative political and religious context in which he has worked. Given the conservative political situation in Thailand and the strength of entrenched views of the socio-cultural significance of the *saṅgha*, the structural contradictions between Buddhadāsa's radical theory and conservative practice are all but unavoidable. As already noted above the contradictions associated with Buddhadāsa's conservative religious practice and support for the traditional asocial role of the monk derive from his having avoided either direct criticism of or interaction with the *saṅgha* hierarchy. To overcome this contradiction would necessitate a direct confrontation with the *saṅgha* hierarchy. But as also previously noted in earlier chapters the *saṅgha* is universally regarded as a holy institution and to attack or criticise it too vehemently is considered inauspicious, sacreligious and highly dangerous, because of the potentiality of unleashing an uncontrollable amount of social disorder and confusion or wun-wāy.

Because of the practical limitations of the tradition within which he has worked Buddhadāsa's thought may in fact represent as radical a reform of institutional Thai Buddhism as is presently possible. The contradiction between his radical thought and conservative practice is after all forced upon him by the orthopraxy of Theravāda Buddhism in which interpretations of doctrine are authorised more by the interpreter's strictness in practice than by his or her intellectual acumen or theoretical arguments. For Thai Buddhism to be more fully reformed and for the tension between theory and practice to be resolved may well require a second generation follower of Buddhadāsa to literally emerge from the "forest" into the social world. If Buddhadāsa's teachings do gain increasing acceptance in the future their role may be as a platform or base for further reform. However, it does not seem possible for Buddhadāsa himself to complete the reforms which he has foreshadowed and discussed.

There is in fact only one theoretical as opposed to practical stumbling block to the further modernisation and reform of Theravāda Buddhism, namely, the

scripturally sanctioned importance of the role of the renunciate monk, and the definition of the monk's spiritual status as being determined by his degree of detachment from the social world. As already discussed at length in the concluding chapters, despite his radical theoretical innovations in most other areas of Theravâda teaching even Buddhadâsa has not been able to slacken this theoretical knot. The role of the lay Buddhist has been expanded to the point where for some of the more educated laypeople monks are almost an irrelevance. However, for political reasons it is not possible at the present time to expand the role of the monk into the social realm. Attempts are being made in this direction but the barriers nevertheless remain. I suggest that the barriers preventing monks from more fully participating in social life are more political than religious or scriptural. For as Buddhadâsa himself has noted the Buddhist virtues of *mettâ* and *karunâ*, i.e. loving-kindness and compassion, can be interpreted as implying the need to actively assist others to end suffering. Theravâda possesses the ingredients necessary to devise a Buddhist theory of clerical social involvement and social action. However, it appears that that doctrinal potential has not been realised because of the pressure to maintain the traditionally constituted *saṅgha* hierarchy as the religious basis of political power.

Because of the historical relations between the monarchy, the Thai state and the *saṅgha*, and because of the long history of political instability since 1932, there is a general reticence to attempt any radical reform which might upset the delicate religious-ideological-political balance in Thailand. More concretely, however, the conservative political forces in Thailand have considerable power and deal strongly with those who attempt to alter the triangular relations of *saṅgha*-king-state upon which their own positions and influence depend. During the 1973-1976 period of civilian government, when many in the *saṅgha* did begin becoming involved in social issues, those clerics who supported social reforms such as land reform, labour union rights, housing and so on, were scapegoated and denounced as communists. With the re-establishment of military rule in 1976 there was a forced return to the traditional clerical role of non-involvement.

Thus while Buddhadâsa's work is without doubt the most important progressive religio-theoretical development in recent Thai history, its full impact and implications have yet to be realised. For Buddhadâsa's religious vision to be fulfilled requires two things. Firstly, there is a need to develop a clear analysis of the role and place of the monk in contemporary Thai society. But more importantly, social and political conditions in Thailand must also change. The realisation of Buddhadâsa's ideas in Thai social life would require the existence of an educated

audience which has enough social and political power to restructure social relations according to their modernist Buddhist ideals. But whether the proportion of more educated, progressive Thais will in fact increase, and whether they will succeed in obtaining real social and political power cannot be predicted at this point. Credit must be given to Buddhadâsa for his monumental theoretical work in which he has planted the seeds of an alternative form of Buddhism and a vision of an alternative Thai society. Whether the full potentiality of those seeds is able to develop will depend upon the future course of political and cultural events in Thailand.

APPENDIX I.

1 Buddhism: Historical Background.

The historical founder of Buddhism was Siddhattha Gotama[1], a prince born into the ruling Sakya (Sanskrit: S'akya) clan of a small kingdom in the Himalayan foothills some two and a half thousand years ago. By Buddhists Siddhattha Gotama is sometimes referred to as Sakyamuni, sage of the Sakyas, or as Gotama Buddha. The term Buddha in fact denotes any person who has attained complete spiritual enlightenment and is not an epithet restricted to the Gotama Buddha, although as the historical founder of the religion he is most commonly referred to simply as the Buddha or "the enlightened one". In the Theravâda Buddhist scriptures, the *Tipiṭaka*, he is most commonly referred to as the Tathāgata, the "thus gone", which in Thailand is usually taken to mean the one who has attained the Buddhist spiritual perfection of *nibbāna*. According to tradition at the age of twenty nine several pivotal events deeply disturbed Siddhattha Gotama, leading him to renounce his life of royal ease as well as his wife and infant son in order to search for spiritual liberation. He tried but rejected as ineffective the Brahmanical and Yogic spiritual systems then existing in ancient India and after six years of following ascetic practices attained full enlightenment near the present Indian town of Bodhgaya after an effort of supreme concentration. He soon developed a following of fellow renunciates who became the forerunners of the present Buddhist monkhood or *saṅgha*, literally "the community". After his enlightenment the Buddha lived to teach his message of liberation from suffering for almost fifty years and it is from the teachings he then gave that the principles and scriptures of Buddhism are reputed to have come.

After the Buddha's death (c. 543 B.C.)[2] a council of his followers met and formalised his teachings but for several centuries Buddhism remained a purely oral

[1]Siddhattha Gotama is the Pali spelling of the Buddha's name. In Sanskrit it is written Siddhartha Gautama.

[2]Thai Buddhists date the Buddha's death at 543 B.C., the year from which the Thai calendar is reckoned. Other Buddhist traditions and many contemporary scholars, however, place his death as late as 480 B.C.

tradition. The texts accepted as canonical by the Theravāda[3] sect now predominant in Thailand were not written down until the first century B.C. when the Ceylonese Buddhist king Vaṭṭagāmini had them inscribed on palm leaf manuscripts. In opposition to the Sanskrit speaking Brahmin priests of his time, whose religion and teachings he rejected, the Tathāgata used a North Indian vernacular related to Sanskrit as the medium for propagating his teachings. This language is thought to have been close to what is now called Pali, which became the classical language of the Theravāda scriptures. The use of Pali distinguishes the Theravāda or "Southern School"[4] of Buddhism from the Mahāyāna[5] or "Northern Schools"[6] whose scriptures are recorded in Sanskrit as well as several national languages such as Tibetan, Chinese, Vietnamese, Mongolian, Korean and Japanese. Schisms based on points of doctrine had appeared in the Buddhist clergy or *saṅgha* within a couple of centuries of the Buddha's death and it was at a Buddhist council in India around 250 B.C. that the forerunners of the two major surviving schools of Buddhism, Theravāda and Mahāyāna, formally split. Because Pali is traditionally considered to be the language of the Buddha the followers of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Kampuchea regard themselves as the bearers of the older and purer form of Buddhism.

Buddhism had almost completely disappeared from its Indian motherland by the Middle Ages whence Ceylon, whose Sinhalese King had become Buddhist around 200 B.C., became the centre of the living Theravāda tradition. And so when the Thai kings formally adopted Theravāda Buddhism in the Sukhothai period some seven hundred years ago it was to Ceylon that they turned for authoritative instruction and definitive versions of the Pali scriptures, which are collectively called the *Tipiṭaka*. *Tipiṭaka* literally means "three baskets", denoting the three wicker containers originally used for storing the main divisions of the palm-leaf manuscripts. The three *piṭaka* or divisions of the Pali Buddhist canon are:

1. *Vinayapiṭaka* - discourses and discussions attributed to the Buddha

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[3]Literally Theravāda means "doctrine of the elders", where "elders" refers to the senior members of the Buddhist monkhood or *saṅgha*.

[4]The countries where Theravāda Buddhism has traditionally been dominant are all located in South and Southeast Asia, i.e. Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Kampuchea.

[5]Mahāyāna literally means "the great vehicle" (for the transmission of the Buddha's teaching). Mahāyānists call Theravāda Buddhism Hinayāna, "the lesser vehicle", a term Theravādins regard as derogatory.

[6]The countries where Mahāyāna Buddhism is dominant are in the main located in North and Northeast Asia.

emphasising matters of practice and discipline which are collectively called the *vinaya*.

2. *Suttapiṭaka* or *Suttantapiṭaka* - discourses by the Buddha plus discussions about the doctrine, which is in general called the *dhamma*.

3. *Abhidhammapiṭaka* - a philosophical development of some of the key ideas of the doctrine or *dhamma*.

Traditionally Theravâda Buddhism has been organised as a national church of monks arranged under a monarch who as upholder of the faith was also ultimate arbiter of clerical disputes and ultimate enforcer of clerical discipline. However, because of the culturally and politically disruptive effects of European imperialism in the other Theravâda countries (Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Kampuchea) this traditional structure is today retained only in Thailand. The Buddhist church itself consists of renunciate monks and the lay persons whose alms and donations support them. However, Theravâdin monks are not in any sense priests interceding with divinities on behalf of the laity but are practicers and teachers of the doctrine who in theory have decided to strive for salvation more intensely by strictly following monastic discipline.

2 Central Tenets of Buddhist Doctrine.

At the level of doctrine and teaching the most important concept in Theravâda Buddhism is that of *dhamma*. *Dhamma* is an extremely broad notion which while denoting the notion of doctrine also implies correct practice aimed at attaining salvation. The Thai Buddhist scholar Sunthorn Na-Rangsi gives the following four-fold definition of *dhamma*,

> 1. *dharma* as nature or natural phenomena, 2. *dharma* as condition or natural law, 3. *dharma* as doctrine as taught and formulated and 4. *dhamma* as the quality of right or righteousness.[7]

Dhamma primarily denotes the order of the cosmos, both natural and moral, which patterns all of existence and whose fundamental truth the Buddha realised upon his enlightenment. The Buddha's insight and teachings are regarded as being informed by this cosmic-ethical order and so the doctrine of salvation is also called *dhamma*. The editors of the *Pali English Dictionary* provide the following as one gloss on the term *dhamma*,

> That which the Buddha preached, the *dhamma* ... was the order of law

[7] Na-Rangsi, pp.v-vi.

of the universe, immanent, eternal, uncreated, not as interpreted by him only, much less invented or decreed by him, but intelligible to a mind of his range.[8]

And insofar as one abides by the Buddha's teachings one also abides by *dhamma* and so the notion of righteousness is also integral to that of *dhamma*.

At the level of soteriology Buddhism focuses on the truth grasped by the Buddha that human existence is inherently unsatisfactory, incomplete and inadequate. This is called the truth of suffering, *dukkha*, or the universality of suffering. The Buddha's saving message was that not only is there a cause of suffering but there is also a way to end it, and suffering can through moral and meditative practice be totally extinguished. The cessation of suffering is called *nirodha* while its complete extinction, even down to its causes, is called *nibbāna*, a term originally associated with extinguishing or putting out a flame. In Buddhist doctrine *nibbāna* is metaphorically interpreted as denoting the extinction of the flames of passion, lust and delusion regarded as prime causes of suffering. This doctrinal core is usually expressed as the "Four Noble Truths" or *ariyasacca*:

(1) There is suffering - *dukkha*.
(2) There is a cause of suffering - *samudaya*.
(3) There is an end to suffering - *nirodha*.
(4) There is a path to the ending of suffering - *magga*.

Suffering or *dukkha* is theoretically linked with the process of rebirth through successive lives and the goal of Buddhism is to attain freedom from the turmoils of repeated births and deaths or *saṁsāra*. The problem of how to end *dukkha* is often expressed in terms of ending the process of rebirth which is, so to speak, the matrix within which suffering inheres. The cessation of suffering thus has both a psychological and a cosmological aspect, involving both the end of the mental state of *dukkha* and of the process of rebirth.

The Buddha proclaimed that the ultimate cause of suffering is *avijjā* or ignorance of reality. The reality of which most people remain ignorant is regarded as having three characteristics or *tilakkhaṇa*, namely, that all things are impermanent, *anicca*, are without an essence, *anattā*, and are inherently related to suffering, *dukkha*. According to the Buddha everything is in flux and so nothing in the world is permanent or capable of providing either a secure physical or mental refuge. He taught that in ignorance of this reality people delude themselves that the physical and mental objects of desire can provide satisfaction. However, because those objects are impermanent and so pass away such deluded desires or cravings

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[8] *Pali English Dictionary*, p.336.

are left unsatisfied, causing suffering. That is, ignorance leads to the delusion that what is in fact impermanent and inessential can provide lasting satisfaction. This delusion then breeds desire or craving for the impermanent things of the world whose evanescence is then the immediate cause of suffering.

Ignorance is also regarded as causing rebirth because it infects action with delusion so that it falls under the sway of the impersonal law of cause and effect called the of law *kamma*. Specifically *kamma* denotes an action performed with desire or intentionality, that is, with the desire to attain a particular object or goal. As Sunthorn Na-Rangsi notes, for any action to be classed as *kamma* it,

> must always be associated with the mental state of volition (*cetanā*). Just an action without volition is not called *karma* in the Buddhist sense of the word, since such an action is not liable to yield any moral consequence to the performer. In the strict sense of the Buddhist doctrine of *karma*, it is volition itself which is called *karma*.[9]

At the psychological level the law of *kamma* states that every intentional action bears an experiential fruit commensurate to the moral quality of the intention. While often simplistically expressed in Thai in the maxim, tham di dai di, tham chua dai chua (ทำดีได้ดีทำชั่วได้ชั่ว) or "Do good get good, do bad get bad", at the theoretical level this doctrine denotes the proposition that every intentional action performed in ignorance is a cause of future suffering. Buddhism isolates the cause of rebirth, and so suffering, as lying in the necessary reactive working out of past intentional actions performed in ignorance. Because not every action has its reaction or *vipāka* effected within the scope of a single lifetime Buddhist doctrine postulates the reality of rebirth, as permitting as yet "unripened" *vipāka* to be effected.

3 Buddhist Practice.

At the level of moral practice Buddhism aims to reduce suffering through exerting self-control and self-restraint on cravings, which are the immediate cause of suffering. This system of self-restraint constitutes the Buddhist moral code, of which there are two general sets, a more basic set for the layperson and a much more elaborate codification of two hundred and twenty seven rules, the *pāṭimokkha*, for the ordained monk. Traditionally Buddhist practice also distinguishes between two levels of spiritual endeavour, the lay or mundane path called *lokiyadhamma* and the ascetic or supramundane path called *lokuttaradhamma*. The mundane path consists essentially of moral practices and while regarded as reducing suffering it still leads

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[9] Na-Rangsi, p.49.

to the production of the "substratum of rebirth", *paṭisandhi-citta*, and does not lead to complete salvation from suffering or from rebirth and does not result in the attainment of *nibbāna*. The supramundane path on the other hand incorporates meditative practices regarded as leading to the complete cessation of rebirth and thus of suffering.

While the practice of morality reduces suffering it does not end it, for so long as there is ignorance there will be the delusion which is the basis of craving. Ignorance is dispelled by the attainment of insight into reality or enlightenment born of meditation. The final key to salvation from suffering is therefore wisdom, *paññā*, or insight into the truths of impermanence and non-essentiality. The Buddha taught that when it is seen that everything one craves must necessarily pass away and leave one suffering in loss such things will no longer be desired and in ceasing to desire the proximate cause of suffering is also destroyed.

Meditation is the pinnacle of Buddhist practice, standing atop a system of practices called the "Noble Eightfold Path" or *ariyamagga*, whose eight "limbs" are also rungs on the ladder leading to salvation. The eight limbs of the Noble Path are:

1.*sammādiṭṭhi*	- right view.
2.*sammāsaṅkappa*	- right intention.
3.*sammāvācā*	- right speech.
4.*sammākammanta*	- right action.
5.*sammā-ājīva*	- right livelihood.
6.*sammāvāyāma*	- right effort.
7.*sammāsati*	- right mindfulness.
8.*sammāsamādhi*	- right concentration or meditation.

Samādhi (point 8. above) is often taken as denoting meditation in general, which in Theravāda Buddhism is systematised into an elaborate range of practices. However, there are two basic types of meditation. The first, concentration meditation or *samādhi*, aims to develop calmness and one-pointedness of mind while the second type, insight meditation or *vipassanā*, aims to use that mental power to delve into the mind and penetrate to a realisation of the true nature of all things as *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. One who has attained such saving insight is called an *arahant*, a "worthy one". With the ending of craving no further *kamma* is created but this does not necessarily mean that all action ceases, for Buddhism recognises a form of liberated activity, *kiriyā*, freed of craving and so also barren of rebirth-causing and suffering-causing results.

Nibbāna, salvation, is the complete freedom from suffering which comes from insight into reality. Two conditions of *nibbāna* are recognised. The first,

sa-upàdisesa nibbàna, is when as yet unreacted results of past actions continue to sustain the aggregates of individual human existence and is a form of salvation attainable while alive. However, the second form, *anupàdisesa nibbàna* or *parinibbàna* is a post-death condition. *Nibbàna* has sometimes been interpreted as equivalent to annihilation and utter extinction into nothingness, seeing as there is no essence or soul to remain after death. However, at least in Thailand this is not the case and *nibbàna* is not regarded as total extinction. Rather it is seen as the extinction of craving and the other factors that lead to suffering. *Nibbàna* is the attainment of a qualitatively different mode of existing in which all delusions about the self and about the objects of desire are extinguished.

4 Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand.

Because of a too scriptural and too philosophical approach many Western students of Buddhism have in the past portrayed the religion as otherworldly and disparaging of everyday mundane life. However, a fuller reading of the scriptures and a closer, anthropological view of the way Theravāda Buddhism is in fact practised and understood by its Southeast Asian adherents reveals it as having had an integral relation to social and political life from the earliest times. However, while it is important to realise that Buddhism is and has always been a socio-political force it is also necessary to appreciate that historically there has been a disparity between the *nibbānic* doctrine of salvation outlined in the previous pages and the popular religion of most Thai Buddhists. Traditionally it has only been the monks and recluses, and often only some of them, who have aimed directly for *nibbāna*. Terwiel describes the common religious outlook in the Thai countryside as follows,

> No farmer aspires to reach *nibbāna*. This exalted state is reserved for the Buddha and the *arahants*. Whilst *nibbāna* certainly may be equated, in the eyes of the farmers, with a feeling of eternal bliss, no normal person can aspire to reach such a state of perfection.[10]

The religion of the layperson is instead oriented towards the accumulation of *kammic* merit through the performance of good deeds and this merit, or the beneficial results of well-intentioned actions, is regarded as facilitating a happier rebirth. To quote Terwiel again, "Thai farmers do not aspire to escape rebirth; instead they wish to be born in better circumstances."[11]

[10] Terwiel, *Religion in Rural Central Thailand*, p.310.

[11] ibid.

Popularly *kammic* merit or in Thai bun (บุญ) and its opposite of demerit or bāp (บาป) are regarded as being produced by previous moral or immoral actions. Bun and bāp cannot cancel each other out but each has its own independent consequences determining the physical, mental and social differences between individuals. To be a man or a woman, whole or deformed, healthy or ill, lord or peasant, wealthy or poor have all traditionally been regarded as results of one's *kammic* inheritance. Nevertheless, merit or bun is not solely an individual thing but can be shared by others in specific ritualised merit-making or tham bun (ทำบุญ) ceremonies. For example, a ritual pouring of water at the end of a religious ceremony in a temple is regarded as transferring all or part of the merit generated by the ceremony to "all sentient beings" or to specifically designated people, often the recently dead. And when a man is ordained into the *saṅgha* the sponsors of the ordination are also considered to participate in the merit thereby generated.

Spiro proposes that at least two kinds of Theravāda Buddhism should be distinguished[12], "*nibbānic* Buddhism" which is concerned with ultimate salvation through escaping from the cycle of suffering regulated by the law of *kamma*, and "*kammatic* Buddhism" which seeks a better rebirth by using the law of *kamma* to acquire merit. In many ways this division corresponds to the distinction found in the commentaries between the *lokiya* or mundane path and the *lokuttara* path described above, but many monks follow a *kammatic* rather than a *nibbānic* form of Buddhism and some lay people follow the *nibbānic* form of the religion. To avoid confusing these religious forms with religious roles it is better to think of *nibbānic* Buddhism as strict doctrinal Buddhism, as found in say the primers of Buddhist philosophy and among more literate and intellectual Buddhists, and to regard *kammatic* Buddhism as the actual popular religion of most Thais, whether layperson or monk. It should be noted that there is an important difference between Spiro's anthropological concept of *kammatic* Buddhism and the doctrinal notion of *lokiyadhamma* mentioned above. In the actual popular religion, i.e. *kammatic* Buddhism, good *kamma* or merit is commonly regarded as itself capable of leading to *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is not seen as a liberation from the net of *kamma* but as resulting from the accumulation of vast amounts of merit, and is regarded as a sort of super-heaven. This is quite different from and actually doctrinally inconsistent with the strict interpretation of *lokiyadhamma* as promoting well-being but not of itself leading to salvation. Strictly speaking even good actions, if performed in

[12] Spiro, pp.10ff.

ignorance, lead to suffering because of attachment to their beneficial results which, like all other things, are impermanent. In doctrinal or *nibbānic* Buddhism all *kammic* accumulations, both meritorious and demeritorious, therefore have to be extinguished before complete *nibbāna* can be attained.

The popular Thai religion is also characterised by the worship of Brahmanical or Hindu-derived deities such as Indra and Vishnu, as well as by belief in magic and the power of both good and evil spirits. The rites of Buddhism are often regarded animistically as being capable of affording protection from evil influences rather than as aspects of a path seeking salvation through wisdom. Terwiel notes this magical element of Thai Buddhism,

> Monks who chant Pali texts, who meditate or who preach emanate protective power ... the greater the store of beneficial *kamma* a monk possesses, the stronger the power he generates. The monk who follows his precepts and who performs meritorious activities can be seen as a source of protective, beneficial power.[13]

Because of the complexity of the actual phenomenon of religion in Thailand there has been considerable academic debate over whether the discernible animist, Brahmanical and Buddhist elements form one integrated system or represent distinct and distinguishable strands. Kirsch maintains that animism and Buddhism are integrated in neither theory nor practice. He sees animism standing, "in symbolic opposition to that which Buddhism values most highly: asceticism, self-control and predictability."[14] At the level of religious practice he says that,

> In contrast to the respect accorded Buddhist and folk Brahman features [of Thai religion] ... considerable ambivalence is expressed about the entire animist domain ... most animist practitioners have little respect among their fellows. There are clearly deep-seated cleavages between animist elements and Buddhism and folk Brahmanism.[15]

While I would agree with Kirsch if by Buddhism he means *nibbānic* or strictly doctrinal Buddhism I do not agree that anthropologically speaking there are any deep-seated cleavages between what is traditionally taken as Buddhism and animist beliefs and practices. Kirsch's view of Buddhism above is particularly doctrinal and abstract and while an observer knowledgeable in doctrinal Buddhism can distinguish the animist from the Buddhist elements of Thai religious practice most accounts of

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[13]**Terwiel**, *Religion in Rural Central Thailand*, pp.165-166.

[14]Thomas A. **Kirsch**, "Complexity in the Thai Religious System", in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.XXXVI No.2, February 1977, p.259.

[15]ibid.

the actual forms of popular Buddhism show that many Buddhist doctrines are in fact ignored or misinterpreted. I agree with Spiro when he says that while Theravāda Buddhism is the overarching religious system in Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka, "many of its doctrines are only rarely internalised by the members of these societies because they are either ignored or rejected by the faithful."[16] Terwiel concurs, saying that,

> Although the *saṅgha* and Buddhism pervade religious life in the villages, this does not necessarily mean that the villager accepts the philosophical tenets of Buddhism or adheres to its soteriology. The Buddhist concepts are often interpreted in such a way that they are in accordance with magico-animist presuppositions.[17]

An example of how Buddhist doctrine is popularly re-interpreted has already been described in the above case of *nibbāna* being regarded as resulting from good *kamma*.

But whatever anthropological explanation of Thai Buddhism one favours a clear appreciation of the explicit doctrinal inconsistency but practical integration of the various elements constituting Thai religion is nevertheless important if the reformist teachings of monks like Buddhadāsa are to be correctly understood. For Buddhadāsa "reforming Buddhism" means instituting a doctrinally consistent religion, and as such Kirsch's comments do describe well the tension between the popular religion and Buddhadāsa's reformed modernist system. However, Spiro's and Terwiel's conclusions of the overall integrity of Thai religion at the popular level are also relevant, especially in analysing the character of the critical responses of religious traditionalists to the form of Buddhism that Buddhadāsa teaches.

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[16] Spiro, p.10.

[17] Barend Jan Terwiel, *Monks and Magic*, 2nd edn, Curzon Press, London, 1979, p.22.

APPENDIX II.

1 Biographical Information on Buddhadāsa.

Buddhadāsa was born on 27th May 1906 at Phumriang, a tambol or village in what is today the amphēē or district of Chaiya in Suratthani Province, Southern Thailand[1]. He was the first son of a Chinese store owner, Siang Phānit (เซียง พานิช), and his Thai wife, Khlȳan (เคลื่อน), and was given the name Ngȳam (เงื่อม). Buddhadāsa is a Pali pen name which he later assumed and by which he now prefers to be known. Buddhadāsa's father was born in Thailand, his grandfather coming from Hokkien in China in the mid-nineteenth century. The Chinese family name was originally Sae Khwō (Hokkien: โขว , Taejiw: โคว), Phānit being an officially conferred Thai surname given in the reign of King Rama VI. Buddhadāsa's mother was of a Thai family from the

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[1] The information detailed in this section has been culled from the following books:

(1) **Chit** Phibānthāen (ชิต ภิบาลแหน), *Chiwit Lae Ngān Khōrng Phutthathāt Phikkhu* ("ชีวิตและงานของพุทธทาสภิกขุ" *The Life and Work of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu*), Sinlapābanākān (ศิลปาบรรณาการ), Bangkok, 2520 (1977).

(2) (Phra) **Prachā** Passanathammō ((พระ) ประชา ปสนฺนธมฺโม), *Lau-wai Mȳa Wai Sonthayā - Atachiwaprawat Khōrng Thān Phutthathāt* ("เล่าไว้เมื่อวัยสนธยา อัตชีวประวัติของท่านพุทธทาส" *Reflections from the Twilight Years - Autobiography of Buddhadāsa*), Mūlanithi Kōmon Khīmthōrng (มูลนิธิโกมลคีมทอง), Bangkok, 2528 (1985).

(3) (Phra) **Rātchananthamunī** ((พระ) ราชนันทมุนี), *Phutthathāt Khȳ Khrai, Thān Tham Arai* ("พุทธทาสคือใคร, ท่านทำอะไร" *Who is Buddhadāsa? What Has He Done?*), Rōng-rīan Phutthatham Wat Chonprathānrangsit (โรงเรียนพุทธธรรม วัด ชลประทานรังสฤษฎ์.), Nonthaburi Thailand, 2525 (1982).

(4) **Arun** Wētchasuwan (อรุณ เวชสุวรรณ),

i. *Sūan Mōk Dāēn Sangop* ("สวนโมกข์แดนสงบ" *Sūan Mōk, The Peaceful Land*), Samnak-phim Phrāē Phithayā (สำนักพิมพ์ แพร่พิทยา), Bangkok, 2524 (1981).

ii. *Sūan Mōk, Mȳang Chaiyā Lae Phutthathāt Phikkhu* ("สวนโมกข์ เมืองไชยาและพุทธทาสภิกขุ" , *Sūan Mōk, Chaiya and Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu*), Samnak-phim Phrāē Phithayā (สำนักพิมพ์ แพร่พิทยา), Bangkok, 2524 (1981).

village of Tha Chang. He has a brother, Yikēy (ยี่เกย), and a sister, Kimsoy (กิมซอย).

The Phānit family was reasonably well off, Buddhadāsa's father, Siang, having established a general store at Phumriang which in the early years of this century functioned as a local meeting place and as the amphöë police station before the district centre was moved to Chaiya just before the Second World War. Buddhadāsa's education began when at the age of eight he became a temple boy at Wat Nōrk (also called Wat Ubon) in Phumriang, where he lived for three years. However, his formal schooling started in 1914 when he began attending Phōthiphitthayākorn School at Wat Phōthārām (also called Wat Nȳa) in Phumriang, where he studied for three years and completed the primary education grade of Prathom 3. He then moved to Chaiya where his father worked and he began studying at the Chaiya District School, Sāraphi-uthit School. Buddhadāsa completed the high school grade of Mathayom 3 but had to leave school to run the family business at Phumriang when his father died in 1922. He then took on the responsibility of supporting the education of his younger brother, Yikēy, who was studying at the prestigious Sūan Kulāp School in Bangkok. Yikēy subsequently began studying medicine at Chulalongkorn University but did not complete his course.

When Yikē returned from studying in Bangkok in 1926 he took over the running of the family business. Buddhadāsa was then freed from his family responsibilities and was able to follow the Thai custom of being ordained into the monkhood at the appropriate age of 21. He was ordained into the Mahānikāy order at Wat Nōrk (Wat Ubon), Phumriang, on 29th July 1926 by Phrakhrū Sōphanacētasikārām (Vimalo) (พระครูโสภณเจตสิการาม), who gave him the Pali clerical name of Indapañño (Thai: Inthapanyō). Phra Ngȳam Indapañño then spent his first phansā or rainy season retreat at Wat Mai (also called Wat Phumriang), Phumriang, where he passed his Naktham-trī(III) exam.[2]

Buddhadāsa had been a bright and studious child and as a high school student in Chaiya he had been interested in reading about and discussing Buddhism. However, there is no indication that until his ordination he felt any special inclination towards becoming a monk. Initially he had decided to remain in the monkhood only for the three or four months of the rainy season monastic retreat. However, he quickly developed a liking for the monk's life and soon showed promise

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[2] The education of monks in Thailand is systematised into various grades, each having a nationally supervised examination. There are three basic grades for new ordinees and novices starting at Tham III or Nakthaṁ III (นักธรรม) and finishing at Naktham I. There are then seven grades of Pali studies for fully ordained monks starting at ParianIII (เปรียญ) and finishing at Parian IX.

both as a scholar and as a teacher. Buddhadāsa has never disrobed since he was first ordained some sixty years ago. Perhaps the young man's interest in remaining a monk was stimulated by the existence at nearby Wat Phōthārām, Chaiya, of a temple school for monks, which had been established in 1925 by monks from Wat Rātchāthiwāt in Bangkok. In the 1920s educational facilities in provincial Thailand were extremely poor and for an academically-minded youth temple schools often provided the only means for furthering intellectual interests.

Nevertheless, Buddhadāsa seems to have quickly developed more than a purely academic interest in Buddhism. In addition to doing well in his monastic examinations (passing his *Naktham-thō* (II) exam in 1927) he also gained a reputation as a good preacher of the *dhamma*, and as having an engaging style of presentation which was more than simple recitation of the Pali scriptures. Buddhadāsa also developed a preference for monastic solitude and seeing as his brother, Yikēy (who now uses the Pali name Dhammadāsa or in Thai Thammathāt) was managing the family business Buddhadāsa received his mother's blessing and encouragement to remain a monk.

At the instigation of an uncle Buddhadāsa went to Bangkok in order to further his studies in July 1928, staying at Wat Pathumkhongkhā. However, he did not find the sort of spiritual education he had expected and met no-one whom he regarded as an able teacher. Buddhadāsa was also dissatisfied with the clerical education of the time and complained that, "In studying the *pariyattidhamma*[3] in this period we don't truly study the *Tipiṭaka* itself, we study only the commentaries."(T)[4] This, together with his disappointment with laxities in the practice of the *vinaya* among Mahānikāy monks in Bangkok made him disinterested in obtaining a theological degree. After only two months Buddhadāsa found his studies oppressive and boring and returned to Chaiya.

In 1929 one of Buddhadāsa's uncles, Ngūan Sētthaphakdī, of the neighbouring town of Bān Dōrn, donated 5,000 Baht for the establishment of a school of scriptural studies at Wat Phrathāt in Chaiya, and Buddhadāsa was invited to be

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[3] *Pariyattidhamma* - the doctrines and the scriptures, that *dhamma* which is to be learnt as opposed to being practised.

[4] Cited by Dūsadī Angsumēthāngkūn (ดุษฎี อังสุเมธางกูร), "Thān Phutthathāt Kap Kān-patirūp Sāsanā" ("ท่านพุทธทาสกับการปฏิรูปศาสนา" "Buddhadāsa and Religious Reform") in Khanakammakān Sāsanā Phŷa Kān-phatanā (คณะกรรมการศาสนาเพื่อการพัฒนา), *Phutthathāt Kap Khon Run-mai* ("พุทธทาสกับคนรุ่นใหม่"), Mūlanithi Kōmon Khīmthōrng (มูลนิธิโกมลคีมทอง), Bangkok, 2526 (1983), p.247.

the instructor. Buddhadāsa also wrote his first book in 1929, a cremation volume for Phrakhrū Sōphanacētasikārām, entitled, *Kān-tham Thān* ("การทำทาน") or *Giving Alms.* When his students passed their Naktham III and Naktham II exams well Buddhadāsa's family decided that he should not waste his obvious academic talents teaching novices and advised him to return to Bangkok and attempt higher study there once again.

1930 found Buddhadāsa once more at Wat Pathumkhongkhā in Bangkok, although this time he decided that he could study more efficiently by doing a significant part of the work by himself. His individualistic approach, so characteristic in the later style of his life and in the innovativeness of his ideas, paid off well and he topped his class in the parian sām-prayōk (III) Pali examinations that year. However, his interests ranged far outside the scriptures and Pali and he followed courses in science, photography and radio as well as the traditional lectures on the exegesis of the *Tipiṭaka.*

The three years Buddhadāsa spent in Bangkok in the early 1930s saw his ideas about Buddhism and the direction of his life crystallise. It was a period when a set of diverse influences prodded him to take a course of action he himself later described as daring. Gradually the issues of religious reform became Buddhadāsa's predominating concern and be began to neglect his formal studies, which he came to see as irrelevant to the crucial problems facing Buddhism. In 1931 he failed his parian prayōk si (IV) Pali examination, something he had expected. After his private readings of the *Tipiṭaka* Buddhadāsa felt that there were significant differences between the commentaries upon which his clerical examinations were based and the actual canonical scriptures. He realised that even if he gave the answers to questions on doctrine which he regarded as being correct he would fail the Pali exams, because his views differed radically from the orthodox interpretations taught in Bangkok. As a consequence he regarded further formal education to be pointless. A letter written to his brother Dhammadāsa towards the end of his second stay in Bangkok shows how Buddhadāsa's reformist ideas had crystallised. He wrote that he intended to discontinue his studies, leave Bangkok and that he had resolved to,

> look for a quiet place free from internal and external vexations ... in order to examine and research the *dhammic* science which I have been studying.
>
> I have had a stroke of good luck ... in that I have found a friend who has the same feelings about life ... we each have the same intention in the future work. We have agreed that Bangkok certainly is not the place to find purity; blundering around studying the scriptures in a way polluted by concern for status. The benefit of this is that we realise we have been

> misdirected. We have followed the world from the minute we were born until the minute we gained this awareness. After this we will not follow the world, and will farewell the world in order to search for what is pure by following the path of the *ariyans* [saints] who searched until they found [*nibbàna*].(T)[5]

In fulfillment of his desire to follow the actual path of the Buddha Buddhadāsa left Bangkok on 5th April 1932 and returned to Wat Mai at Phumriang. Other monks were to have accompanied him but because of family pressures they abandoned the idea, leaving Buddhadāsa to carry on alone. But Dhammadāsa and a small party of his associates strongly supported Buddhadāsa and together they decided that the spiritual retreat should be undertaken at a long-abandoned and overgrown temple, Wat Traphangcik or simply Wat Phangcik, near Phumriang. Buddhadāsa took up residence there on 12th May 1932 and renamed the temple area Sūan Mōkkhaphalārām (สวนโมกขพลาราม), literally, "The garden to arouse the spirits to attain liberation." Today the temple is usually simply called Sūan Mōk, "The garden of liberation."

It was in the following month that the democratic revolution which overthrew the absolute monarchy occurred and Buddhadāsa's comments on this event reflect how he viewed his religious enterprise,

> We take this event [the revolution] as an omen of changing to a new era, for rectifying and improving various things as much as we can.(T)[6]

The intensity of the twenty six year old monk's determination can be gauged from the following vow, written in a notebook on 28th August 1932,

> I commit this life and body as a dedication to the Lord Buddha. I am a servant of the Buddha, the Buddha is my lord. For this reason I am named "Buddhadāsa" (literally, "servant of the Buddha").[7]

For the following two years Buddhadāsa lived alone at Sūan Mōk, following the solitary life of a forest monk. In 1935 another monk, Phra Sāsanapachōtō Phikkhu, accompanied him for the phansā rainy season retreat and over the next few years the number of monks and novices residing at Sūan Mōk grew to ten. Because of limited space at the Wat Traphangcik site, in 1943 Sūan Mōk was moved to its present location on almost a hundred acres of hilly land at Wat Thān-nām-lai, several kilometres southeast of Chaiya.

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[5]Chit Phibānthāēn, pp.39-40.

[6]ibid. p.48.

[7]ibid. p.11.

Dhammadāsa was far from inactive during these formative years and was in constant contact with his brother. Together they developed a plan for propagating their ideas of the purer, original Buddhism. They agreed that their work needed to proceed gradually, starting with a few and only slowly building up numbers. They also felt it had to be a truly religious work, avoiding fame and honour. The first stage was for Dhammadāsa to establish a group of people interested in publishing books on the *dhamma*, and the second stage was for this group to actively promote the *dhamma*. Dhammadāsa established the Khana Thammathān (คณะธรรมทาน), "The Society of the Gift of Truth", and took the Pali motto, *sabbadānaṁ dhammadānaṁ jināti*, "The gift of truth excels all other gifts".

With the object of, "propagating the correct principles of the *dhamma*,"[8] Dhammadāsa in 1933 began publishing a magazine, *Phutthasāsanā* (*Buddhism*), aiming at national distribution. And in the first heady years after the democratic revolution his small group was infused with a strong sense of destiny and of the possibility of effecting real progress in the character of Buddhism. As Buddhadāsa noted at the time,

> We have consequently reached the appropriate time for promoting the progress of the practice of *dhamma* to obtain true fruits of the blessed religion. And we should do this by trying to find ways or means to help a large number of individuals understand correctly and more truly the *dhammic* principles of the blessed prophet, son of the Sakyas.(T)[9]

Just as the democratic revolution brought the promise of devolving political power to the people so too Buddhadāsa saw his and the Khana Sonthanātham's propagatory work as revealing the true core of Buddhism for all to know.

Since World War II other organistions have been established with the specific purpose of publishing and distributing Buddhadāsa's writings and sermons. In 1953 Dhammadāsa formally incorporated the Khana Thammathān as a foundation, the Thammathān Mūlanīthi. In association with this Chaiya-based organisation, which has its own library and press, is the Bangkok-based Thammabūchā (ธรรมบูชา "Honouring Dhamma") printing house, which in turn is operated by the Khana Phōēy-phrāē Withī Kān-damnōēn Chīwit An Prasōēt (คณะเผยแพร่วิธีการดำเนินชีวิตอันประเสริฐ "The Group for Promoting the Method of Leading One's Life Perfectly"). Another organisation dedicated to the publication of Buddhadāsa's work is the Ongkān Fȳn-fū Phra Phutthasāsanā

[8] ibid. p.114

[9] ibid. pp.103-104.

(องค์การฟื้นฟูพระพุทธศาสนา "The Organisation for the Revival of Buddhism"), which was established by the late Pun Congprasōēt at Samut Prakan near Bangkok.

Gradually since 1932 Buddhadāsa's ideas have become more and more widely recognised. While not always being in agreement with them Buddhadāsa has enjoyed the company of two generations of liberal democratic politicians, symbolised by his meetings with Pridī Phanomyong and his sometimes stormy interactions with Khukrit Pramot. During the Second World War a politician from Buddhadāsa's home province of Suratthani, Wuti Suwannarat, came to know of his ideas and gave some of Buddhadāsa's books to the democrat and former Prime Minister, Pridī Phanomyong. Pridī invited Buddhadāsa to Bangkok and when the two met they spoke from 1pm till 10pm on three consecutive days. While the content of their conversations is not recorded the mere length of time the cabinet minister took off from his duties indicates something of the importance Pridī placed on the discussion. Pridī was also inspired to consider arranging for a temple like Sūan Mōk to be built in his home province of Ayutthia, but his being forced into exile after the death of King Rama VII in 1947 meant the plan was never realised.

At this same time Buddhadāsa was also invited to give a series of addresses to the Phutthasamākhom (Buddhist Society of Thailand), the content of his talks and responses setting a pattern for his relations with the *saṅgha* hierarchy which has by and large continued to the present day. He entitled one of his addresses, "The Mountainous Methods of Buddhist Dhamma - Things Which Obstruct People From Obtaining Buddhist Dhamma."[10] It was a criticism of the practice of Thai Buddhism which in turn drew vehement criticism both from lay and clerical members of the audience. One Phra Thipprinyā accused Buddhadāsa of debasing the Theravāda tradition by his views. Indeed, as Sulak Sivaraksa notes, "The work of Buddhadāsa has never received any encouragement from ecclesiastical circles."(T)[11]

However, while drawing severe criticism from some, even being labelled heretical, the *saṅgha* has not been able to ignore Buddhadāsa, for as Sulak glowing reports,

At the present time, his impact is nation-wide. It is largely due to

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[10] In Thai the address was titled, "Phūkhau Withī Phutthatham Sing Thī Khwāng-kan Mai Hai Khon Khau Pai Sū Phutthatham" (ภูเขาวิธีพุทธธรรม สิ่งที่ขวางกั้นไม่ให้คนเข้าไปสู่พุทธธรรม), Cited by (Phra) Rātchananthamunī, p.26.

[11] Sulak Siwarak, *Khanchōrng Sōrng Phra* ("คันฉองส่องพระ"), p.233.

> Buddhadâsa that the younger generation in Siam now turn to Buddhist values and take Buddhism seriously. He has written more books on Buddhism than any other scholar - past or present - and his thought continues to become even more profound.[12]

Recent years have seen Buddhadâsa receive increasing public recognition, being the first monk to be made an honorary member of the widely recognised research body, the Siam Society. During the 1973-76 period Buddhadâsa received nation-wide coverage when he debated the senior Thai politician Khukrit Pramot on television and radio. In 1980 the Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University[13] conferred on him an Honorary Doctorate of Buddhism, the first it had presented in its ninety year existence. This degree was conferred by none other than the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai *saṅgha*. Buddhadâsa has also recently been awarded the honorary clerical title of Phra Rātchawisutthimēthī (พระราชวิสุทธิเมธี).

The temple site at Sūan Mōk has grown considerably over the years and now there are often up to eighty monks and perhaps some hundreds of laymen and laywomen visiting or staying at the centre at any one time. A branch temple of Sūan Mōk is located at Wat Umōng near Chiangmai. Wat Chonprathānrangsit at Pāk-kret in Nonthaburi also has close associations with Sūan Mōk, its abbot, Phra Rātchananthamunī or Panyanantha Phikkhu, being a former student of Buddhadāsa's.

[12] Sulak Sivarksa, Introduction to Swearer, *Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa and the Buddhist Reformation in Thailand*, p.2.

[13] Mahachulalongkorn is the university for monks from the Mahanikay sect, Mahamakut is the corresponding institution run by the Thammayut sect, admitting monks and novices from both sects.

GLOSSARY OF THAI AND PALI TERMS.

Arranged in English Alphabetical order.

Abhidhammapiṭaka - The predominatly philosophical and analytical final section of the *Tipiṭaka*.

ācān or acharn (Thai) - Honorific term for a graduate or honoured teacher or lecturer. Used for both monks and laypeople.

ākāsānañcāyatana - The realm of boundless space, the first absorption or *jhāna* of the immaterial sphere, *arūpajjhāna*.

akiñcaññāyatana - The realm of nothingness, the third absorption or *jhāna* of the immaterial sphere, *arūpajjhāna*.

akusala - Morally unwholesome or unprofitable.

anāgāmi - A "non-returner", an enlightened person or *ariyapuggala* who will not be reborn as a human being.

ānāpānasati - Form of meditation based on observation of the inward and outward breath.

anattā - Non-self, non-essentiality; one of the three characteristics of existence or <*tilakkhaṇa*. See also *anicca*, *dukkha*.

anicca - Impermanence, one of the *tilakkhaṇa* or three characteristics of existence. See also *anattā*, *dukkha*.

anupādisesa nibbāna - *Nibbāna* without the factors of existence remaining. The ultimate form of *nibbāna* traditionally regarded as being attained after death.

anusaya - an inherent, latent unwholesome proclivity; the underlying cause of explicit *kilesa*.

arahant - An enlightened person who has fully attained *nibbāna*, see *ariyapuggala*.

ariya - A spiritually enlightened person.

ariyamagga	- The "noble path" or "noble eightfold path" of Buddhist practice, i.e. *sammādiṭṭhi*, *sammāsaṅkappa*, *sammāvācā*, *sammākammanta*, *sammā-ājīva*, *sammāvāyāma*, *sammāsati*, *sammāsamādhi*.
ariyapuggala	- "Noble individuals", those who have attained or are in the process of attaining enlightenment, i.e. *sotāpanna*, *sakidāgāmi*, *anāgāmi*, *arahant*.
ariyasacca	- The "four noble truths" realised by the Buddha and forming the basis of Buddhist doctrine, i.e. 1. there is suffering, 2. there is a cause of suffering, 3. There is an end to suffering, 4. there is a path to the attainment of the ending of suffering.
ariyasāvaka	- A "noble follower", a disciple of the Buddha.
arūpajjhāna	- The four meditative absorptions or *jhānas* of the immaterial spheres, i.e. *ākāsānañcāyatana*, *viññāṇañcāyatana*, *ākiñcaññāyatana*, *nevasaññānāsaññāyata na*.
āsava	- Deep-seated moral defilements. See also *kilesa*.
attā	- Self, used to denote the notion of a permanent self or soul. A doctrine which is denied by Buddhist doctrine.
avijjā	- Ignorance.
bhavacakka	- The "cycle of becoming", an alternative term for *paṭiccasamuppāda*.
bhavaṅga	- a subliminal level of consciousness regarded as important in the process of rebirth.
bhikkhu	- A Theravādin monk, a member of the Buddhist *saṅgha*.
bhikkhunī	- a Theravādin nun.
bodhipakkhiyadhamma	- The thirty seven requisites or items pertaining to enlightenment.
bodhisatta	- The Theravāda notion of a being destined to attain complete salvation or Buddhahood, c.f. *bodhisattva*.
bodhisattva(Sanskrit)	- A Mahāyāna Buddhist saint who vows not to enter into complete *nirvāṇa* until all other sentient beings have likewise been saved, c.f. *bodhisatta*.

brahmacariya	- The holy life of a renunciate, usually equated with celibacy.
cakkavattin	- Universal Monarch, the Buddhist ideal of a king who rules in accord with the *dhamma*.
cakravartin(Sanskrit)	- see *cakkavattin*.
cetàsika	- A general term for the mental categories such as *vedanā*, *saṅkhāra* and *saññā* which are characteristic of a mind suffused by craving and ignorance.
cit-wāng(Thai)	- Literally: "voided-mind", "emptied-mind" or "freed-mind". Used by Buddhadāsa as the Thai rendering of *suññatā*.
dasarājadhamma	- The ten qualities of a righteous Buddhist monarch.
devatā	- A celestial being.
dhamma	- The natural order of the cosmos, the doctrine of salvation realised by the Buddha and based upon that natural order, and righteous activities in accord with that doctrine and the order of the cosmos.
dhammādhiṭṭhāna	- Exposition of Buddhist doctrine in terms of elements or factors, *dhammas*. Distinguished from *puggalādhiṭṭhāna* (q.v.) or exposition of the doctrine in terms of individuals or persons constituted by those elements.
dhātu	- a constitutive element.
dukkha	- Suffering, one of the three characteristics of existence or *tilakkhaṇa*.
farang(Thai)	- A Westerner.
iddhi	- psychic power.
jāti	- Birth or rebirth.
jhāna	- a trance or "absorption" induced by concentration meditation or *samādhi*.
kamma	- Intentional or volitional actions which accrue moral reactions or *vipāka* to the performer.
karma(Sanskrit)	- see *kamma*.
khandha	- one of the five aggregates or elements which constitute human existence, i.e. 1: *rūpa* - materiality, 2: *vedanā* - feeling, 3: *saññā* -

perception, 4: *saṅkhāra* - mental factors associated with desire, 5: *viññāṇa* - consciousness.

kilesa - A mental defilement or impurity which leads to suffering.

kusala - Morally wholesome or profitable.

lokadhamma - The worldly conditions of the ordinary person or *putthujana*.

lokiya - Mundane, worldly; associated with the realm of attachment, craving and suffering.

lokiyadhamma - The spiritual path of practices for the world-involved layperson.

lokuttara - Supramundane, transcendent; associated with *nibbāna* or the path leading to the attainment of *nibbāna*.

lokuttaradhamma - Traditionally the spiritual path of the renunciate monk.

Mahānikāy(Thai) - Literally, "The Great Division (Sect)", the older and larger of the two official sects of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand.

Mahāyāna - "The Great Vehicle", a generic term for the "Northern Schools" of Buddhism found in China, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Tibet and Mongolia.

moha - delusion.

nāma - Mentality; a generic term for the four immaterial *khandhas* of *vedanā* (feeling), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (combining mental factors) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness).

nāmarūpa - Human individuality or individual existence as impermanent and innessential and composed of the five *khandhas*, or of *nāma* and *rūpa* i.e. mentality and physicality.

nevasaññānāsaññāyata na - The sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, the fourth absorption or *jhāna* of the immaterial sphere, *arūpajjhāna*.

nibbāna - Salvation, the complete and permanent extinction of suffering.

nikāy(Thai) - A sect of **Theravāda** Buddhism, see **Mahānikāy, Thammayut.**

nikāya	- A subdivision of the **Theravāda** canon, e.g. *Dīgha-nikāya*, *Majjhima-nikāya*, etc.
nirvāṇa}Sanskrit)	- see *nibbāna*.
opapātika	- Spontaneously born beings.
paccekabuddha	- One who attains enlightenment but does not teach or proclaim his realisation to the world, c.f. *sammāsambuddha*.
paññā	- Wisdom; liberating insight into reality.
paramatthasacca	- Absolute truth, founded on transcendent insight into eternal truth, *sacca*.
pariyattidhamma	- The doctrines and scriptures of Buddhism; that *dhamma* which is to be learnt as opposed to being practised.
paṭiccasamuppāda	- The doctrine of dependent origination, explaining the causal relations between ignorance and craving, and the arising of suffering and of rebirth.
pāṭimokha	- The clerical code of conduct for Theravādin monks.
paṭisandhiviññāṇa	- Rebirth linking consciousness, the link between the end of one life and the beginning of the next.
parinibbāna	- Absolute salvation, freedom from suffering.
phansā(Thai)	- The annual three month rainy season retreat during which monks remain based at one temple, the "Buddhist lent".
phāsākhon - phāsātham(Thai)	- Literally "human language" - *"dhamma* language", Buddhadāsa's theory of scriptural interpretation.
phikkhu(Thai)	- The Thai term for *bhikkhu* (q.v.).
phra(Thai)	- an honorific used before the name of a monk, a Thai term used to mean a Buddhist monk.
piṭaka	- One of the three main divisions of the **Theravāda** scriptures, i.e., *Vinayapiṭaka*, *Suttapiṭaka* and *Abhidhammapiṭaka*.
puggalādhiṭṭhāna	- Exposition of the Buddhist doctrine in terms of persons or individuals, c.f. *dhammādhiṭṭhāna*.
putthujana	- A "worldling", an ordinary person.

rūpa - Materiality; the *khandha* or aggregate of human existence which confers form and substantiality, c.f. *nāma*.

sacca - Truth.

sakidāgāmi - An enlightened person who will be reborn as a human being just one more time.

saññāvedayitanirodha - Extinction of feeling and perception, the temporary suspension of all mental activity following immediately upon the attainment of the eighth *jhāna* or *nevasaññānāsaññāyata na.*

samādhi - Concentration meditation.

sammā - right, correct; righteous.

sammā-ājīva - Right livelihood.

sammādiṭṭhi - Right belief.

sammākammanta - Right bodily action.

sammāsamādhi - Right concentration.

sammāsambuddha - A universal Buddha who not only attains enlightenment but also proclaims a message of salvation to the world, c.f. *paccekabuddha*.

sammāsaṅkappa - Right Thought.

sammāsati - Right mindfulness.

sammāvācā - Right speech.

sammāvāyāma - Right effort.

saṁsāra - The cycle of rebirth and suffering caused by ignorance and craving.

sammatisacca - Conventional truth; truth according to the common conventions of language use.

saṅgha - The Buddhist monkhood, the order of renunciate Buddhist monks.

saṅkhāra - A mental formation resulting resulting from volitional or *kamma*-causing actions and which is the immediate cause of rebirth and of *vipāka*.

sāsana - The dispensation of the Buddha; Buddhist teaching; a term used to denote Buddhism as a religion.

sassataditthi - The heterodox doctrine that there is an eternal self or *attā*.

sa-upādisesa nibbāna - *Nibbāna* with the factors of existence remaining, traditionally, regarded as *nibbāna* attained while still alive, c.f. *anupādisesanibbāna*.

sīla - Ethics, good conduct.

sotāpanna - A "stream enterrer", one who is in the process of attaining *nibbāna*.

sukhavipassatha - The path to *nibbāna* via the practice of insight meditation or *vipassanā*.

suññatā - Void, emptiness, a state free from ignorance, craving and suffering.

s'ūnyatā(Sanskrit) - The Sanskrit equivalent of *suññatā*.

sutta - A division of the **Theravāda** scriptures, a section of one of the *piṭakas*.

Suttapiṭaka - The second main division of the **Theravāda** scriptures composed mainly of expository discourses by the Buddha and his close disciples.

Suttanta, Suttantapiṭaka - Another name for the *Suttapiṭaka*.

Tathāgata - an epithet of the Buddha.

taṇhā - Craving.

Thammayut(Thai) - Literally, "Those adhering strongly to the *dhamma*", one of the two official sects of **Theravāda** Buddhism in Thailand.

Theravāda - The "doctrine of the elders", the "Southern School" of Buddhism predominant in Thailand.

thūparāha - Literally, "stupa-deserving", an honoured or venerated person considered worthy of having a pilgrimage stupa erected over their bodily remains.

tilakkhaṇa - The three characteristics of existence, i.e., *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anattā* (non-self).

Tipiṭaka - The canonical **Theravāda** scriptures, incorporating the *Vinayapiṭaka*, *Suttapiṭaka* and the *Abidhammapiṭaka*.

Traibhūmikathā - A fourteenth century Thai text on Buddhist cosmology.

Trai Phūm Phra Rūang(Thai) - see *Traibhūmikathā*.

upacāra - "Access concentration", a basic level of *samādhi* regarded as sufficient for the practice of *vipassanā*.

upādāna - Attachment, clinging.

upekkhā - Equanimity.

vaṭṭsaṁsāra - The cycle of rebirth and suffering, c.f. *saṁsāra*.

vicāra - Discursive thinking.

vinaya - The code of moastic discipline, as laid down in the *Vinayapiṭaka*.

Vinayapiṭaka - Section of the canonical **Theravāda** scriptures dealing with the codes of monastic discipline or *vinaya*.

viññāṇa - Consciousness.

viññāṇañcāyatana - The sphere of boundless consciousness, second of the four absorptions of the immaterial sphere, *arūpajjhāna*.

vipāka - the reactive out-working of accumulated *kamma*.

vipassanā - Insight meditation, a form of meditation aiming for liberating insight into reality.

vitakka - Thought conception, rational thought.

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